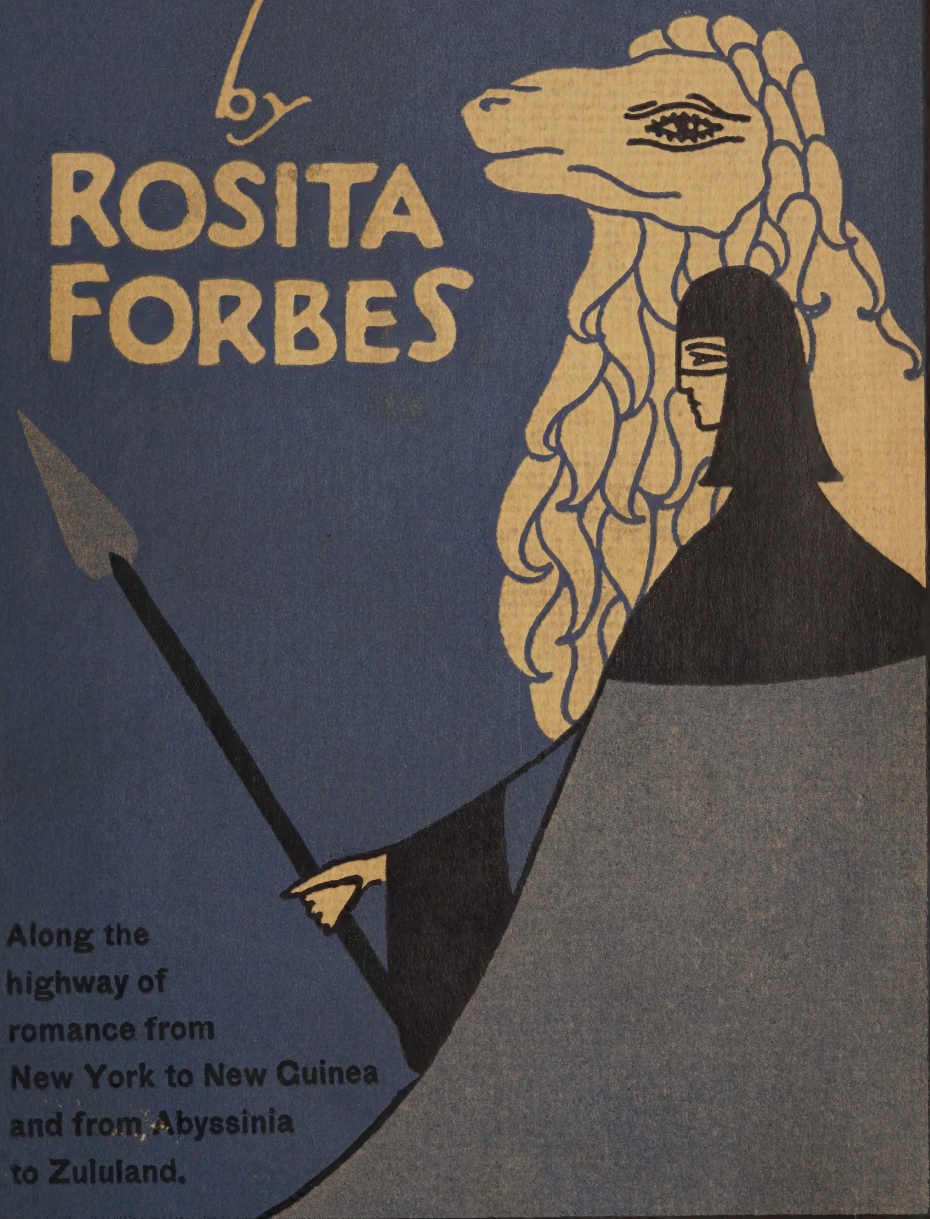


# ADVENTURE

by  
**ROSITA  
FORBES**



Along the  
highway of  
romance from  
New York to New Guinea  
and from Abyssinia  
to Zululand.



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## ADVENTURE

*By Rosita Forbes*

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THE extraordinary travel adventures of Rosita Forbes have made her one of the most famous, as she certainly is one of the most interesting, of modern English women. 'Adventure' is a sheaf of adventurous experiences and happenings gathered from all parts of the world and told in a manner that will delight all who love audacity and appreciate a good story.

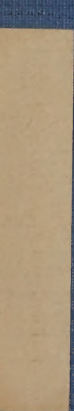
Most of the book is naturally given to tales of life in the Arab countries with which the author is most familiar, but there are also fascinating chapters of the author's experiences in other countries, including America, where she has traveled both in the wilderness and in the cities.

'An anthology of thrills — climax on climax.' — *London Graphic*. 'A travel book without a dull page.' — *London Sketch*.

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# ADVENTURE

*WORKS BY THE SAME  
AUTHOR*

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*TRAVEL—*

THE SECRET OF THE SAHARA :  
KUFARA  
FROM RED SEA TO BLUE NILE

*BIOGRAPHY—*

RAISULI : THE SULTAN OF THE  
MOUNTAINS

*FICTION—*

THE JEWEL IN THE LOTUS  
QUEST  
A FOOL'S HELL  
IF THE GODS LAUGH  
SIROCCO







EVERY TRAVELLER HAS HIS OR HER OWN PARTICULAR PEGASUS. . . . HIS MOST SATISFACTORY JOURNEYS ARE DONE ASTRIDE THIS IMAGINARY STEED.



# ADVENTURE

By  
ROSITA FORBES

BEING A GIPSY SALAD—SOME INCIDENTS, EXCITEMENTS  
AND IMPRESSIONS OF TWELVE HIGHLY - SEASONED YEARS

*With Four Colour Plates*  
By ROBIN d'ERLANGER



BOSTON • AND • NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

1928

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*Printed in Great Britain*



Dedicated to

"THE LEGION THAT NEVER WAS LISTED."

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Every traveller has his, or her, own particular Pegasus. His most satisfactory journeys are done astride this imaginary steed . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
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# ADVENTURE

## CHAPTER I

### BREAKING A LANCE WITH LIFE

EVERY traveller must have had his own particular Pegasus stabled in a nursery cupboard, or under the schoolroom window. My first, farthest, and most satisfying journeys were astride this imaginary steed and, I remember, arithmetic stimulated his paces. I always collected maps and I preferred the kind decorated with stiff little ships, sails bellying in a breeze which looked like a comet, with unicorns or savages to denote the wilderness.

I hid a particularly engaging specimen—it had dolphins wherever the coastal survey was uncertain—between the pages of my Euclid, and while I was supposed to be struggling with the *Pons Asinorum*, I was really bridging the Tigris, or following the hosts of Alexander.

The curly red lines across African deserts had the fascination of a magnet, and I hoped, fervently, that the pioneers, who were writing their names over the blank spaces, would leave just one small desert for me!

“You will live all the stories that other people write,” prophesied an emotional visitor, to whom I confided my ambitions.

“Don’t put ideas into the child’s head,” reproved my governess. But the ideas were already there. In spite of various passions, for hunting, for biographical

literature, for crowded London streets, seen from the tops of buses, for a number of lost dogs and lost causes and once, hypnotized by Italian colour, for painting; in spite of the elation of school exams and an accepted article on bird life and flying with Merrian at Brooklands in a plane like a box-kite; in spite of the gloom of an attempted novel, burned in the library fire, and the depression coincident with an immature desire to create, the ideas remained. They were queer and muddled. In them, travel was synonymous with adventure and there were no fences, laws or inhibitions.

In order to realize them I married a soldier, en route for India, and I hoped that he, also, was an Ishmael who would start for China at an hour's notice, or change his plans half-way up a ship's gangway, leaving his possessions to go to South America while he went seal-hunting off an ice-floe.

It would have been a wearing life and, perhaps fortunately, it fell short of my imagination, but I liked not knowing what was going to happen next. I collected a considerable amount of heterogeneous knowledge and no habits.

Habits are our jailers and possessions our prison walls. A wanderer can have no household gods and he must also be indifferent to such unimportant things as food, sleep and washing.

I've slept on anything or nothing—on a sloping shelf of rock above the red cave city of Petra in the Hedjaz; on a table in a Tongan shed; on a native mat in Fiji; on an opium couch in Siam; on desert sands in Africa and Arabia; in the ammunition wagon of a Chinese troop-train; in an armoured car in Palestine; on the decks of innumerable junks, sampans and dhows; on the earthen floors of as many huts, stables and caves.

Once I couldn't even wash my hands for seventeen



days. Often I haven't had a bath for months. I've lived on dead camel, locusts, sea-worms grilled till they tasted like spinach, octopus floating in oil, its inside scooped out and filled with garlic, and once, in a Samoan isle, on what my German host described as "a leetle sick horse," which tasted like sucking pig.

I've learned that nothing is impossible, except a certain brand of Government official, and even they have been known to look the other way—as once in Papua which was (then) a simple island. You might do anything you liked except smuggle birds of Paradise. The Government was anxious to protect these exquisite creatures, especially as the natives killed them by the score to decorate their head-dresses, so they imposed a fine of £200 on each smuggled bird. Undaunted, I bought thirteen gorgeous red-and-yellows for two bottles of whisky, strung them on a string like a sort of petticoat, and tied them round my waist under my skirt. It was a windy day and I was nervous boarding the ship lest a sudden gust should reveal my secret. Moreover, I couldn't sit down because of the beaks.

Nothing happened. Probably the authorities knew I hadn't enough money to pay the fine and the local jail was inadequate for white prisoners.

My first real journey began at Durban, where I landed with an English return ticket and sixty pounds. Most of the money went on the purchase of a horse, astride which, with a revolver that I didn't know how to use, a toothbrush, a comb and a clean shirt, I started riding north. I forget what happened to that horse, but I was lent innumerable others.

Eventually, sleeping in police camps and native kraals, sometimes escorted by a friendly chief, a Boer farmer, or the local cavalry, sometimes alone, I wan-

dered north to Rhodesia. Here Government House put down its foot.

"I want to go across the Zambezi," I insisted.

"If you did," retorted His Excellency, "all we should find of you would be one spurred riding-boot and a dead lion, choked by the other." So I was put on a south-bound train, which completely exhausted my resources. I had to decide during the last days whether I would hire a pillow to sleep on that night, or buy some bananas to eat. Whatever the vegetarians may say, bananas are not at all satisfying to the veld-sharpened appetite of twenty, but I existed on them for eighteen hours and pawned my wedding-ring for very inadequate lodging at Cape Town till the home-bound steamer arrived.

War broke out as I reached England, and I worked as a masseuse in a London hospital till the Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires appealed for ambulance drivers at the front. That was my chance. I took it, and a forty-five-horse-power Mercédès which made a *soufflé* of my inside whenever I draped myself agonizedly round the starting-handle.

That machine could kick in more directions than a mule, but I drove it to most of those immortal places on the Western Front, Commercý, Belfort and Montauban, and, finally, into a shell-hole, wherein I also deposited a good deal of skin, a splinter of bone and some teeth.

"Take a rest," said the French doctors and dentists who mended me—horribly publicly in a long shed, wherein *poilus* waited their turn and kindly ignored my anguish. "A sea voyage," suggested a pompous individual at the base hospital, who was far too solidly earth-bound to consider submarines.

I collected a travelling companion, the Undine of

my first book, golden-haired and soulless, with an infallible smile.

She had a marvellous power of getting the most out of life and any form of Government official. We spent a wonderful year wandering round the earth on tramp steamers, river junks, where the log was punctuated by strange smells of copra and rotting onion, salt, fermenting rice or oil-stained, kat-chewing humanity. We rode anything four-legged, from an elephant to a water-buffalo and, when we were too broke even to hire an "ecca"—a sort of mouse-trap on wheels popular in Cochin China—we tramped to the nearest embassy or Government House and demanded shelter in the name of our famous and fortunately far-distant relatives.

It is harder for the rich man to become a pilgrim than for any number of camels to pass through that low door in the wall of Jerusalem, known in the Bible as the eye of a needle. Luckily, Undine and I had only £400 apiece for our wander year, so most of our time was spent trudging across the mountains of Japan, or Fiji, with a coolie carrying our single suit-case, or drifting across Cambodian lakes in a "pirogue"—a horrible craft under whose low reed roof you cannot stand upright. I nearly set ours on fire one night by lighting a match to look for mosquitoes inside our carefully-draped net. The wind intervened. The boatman plunged rapidly into the water, which so shook the craft that I upset myself among the cooking pots, and it was left to Undine to tear down the flaming muslin.

When we started, we had some quite respectable luggage, but, after the first few months, we had thrown away most of our clothes to make room for such treasure-trove as models of Java sampans, Buddhas from Siam, and soapstone priests from Korea. The



trunks revolted, and, eventually, after escaping from Chinese brigands, the hitherto unnavigated rapids of the Sian River, and the cannibals of the Solomon Islands, we found the legs of brass elephants, or the spikes of toy temples sticking out of their sides. Our arrival in Ottawa was epic, for the most polished and pluperfect A.D.C. was sent to meet us, and his horror can be imagined when we refused to be parted from a mud-stained, blood-stained, storm-stained holdall which dripped alternate clothing and curios from its burst seams.

A worse problem awaited us, for, in a brocaded suite at Government House, with a frilly and expectant maid looking on, we found we had only two complete garments. One was a mayoral red velvet suited to mid-winter in the suburbs, the other a white muslin unsuited to anything but a midsummer river. We tossed a penny to decide which should freeze and which should bake. The A.D.C. was even more horrified than at the station, but the chamberlain, Lord Richard Nevill, too used to kings to bother about clothes, comforted us with maple-sugar.

It was towards the end of this comprehensive journey that I began to take stock of life. Temporarily, I had left Undine with some friends in a Canadian ranch, so I thought I would ride over the Rockies into America. It never occurred to me to hire a proper outfit. I started off cheerfully, astride a lugubrious quadruped, misnamed Butterfly, dragging a pack-pony behind me. After an encounter with a cinnamon bear, wherein my scarlet parasol was much more effective than my revolver, I got lost in a storm and was rescued by a hunter. He told me he couldn't think why women had been invented at all, lent me all his blankets, and, over a kettle of the blackest tea I've ever seen, with a green twig across it to keep it from

smoking, asked me "what in 'tarnation' I thought I was doing." I began to wonder myself.

With the object of finding out, as soon as I returned to the England of the Armistice, I wrote down my impressions of an unforgettable year.

That was my first book. A friend called it "Baedeker and Bath-salts." The publisher said it was original, because it showed "such a feminine point of view." Nobody bought it, but it received a generous column in the *Times Literary Supplement*. I have never understood why, for it was full of adjectives and split infinitives, but one of the phrases in the review impressed me:—

"Wherever they went," said the critic, "they asked for whatever they wanted, from the Government yacht to a native saddle, with the confidence of well-bred children who had never been refused."

This, I decided, was how one should treat life. Assured of its friendliness, one should ask from it, or give to it, with equal confidence.

I began to consider my assets and liabilities. Most travellers, I suppose, are endowed with a certain amount of that self-reliance and physical courage, result of sound nerves, good digestion and a controlled imagination, which are as much a gift from heaven as slim ankles or an ear for music.

In addition to this, a life on the edge of civilization, sometimes far beyond that edge, ought to reach quickness of thought and action, and a comparatively sound judgment of one's fellows, for continued existence may depend on such qualities.

It generally induces a sense of responsibility, for no member of the caravan can consider himself alone. He is co-responsible with the others for the safety of men and beasts. Any expedition into the unknown entails team-work, for the strength of a caravan is that

of its weakest link, just as the strength of one's contribution to life is that of one's weakest quality.

Mine has always been laziness. I am not lazy in action, but, invariably, I have to fight against putting off till to-morrow any form of mental labour. If we get into camp late and some native happens to make good coffee and there are a few cigarettes left, it is almost more than I can bear to shorten the precious moment of relaxation in sunset, star-rise, or the light of a brush fire, in order to write up a diary and a route report, to examine blistered human heels and the sore backs of mules, to ration fodder, fuel and food, to argue over the price of supplies and the shortage in somebody's cartridge belt.

Worse still, I am impatient. It is torture to me to watch slow, clumsy loading; listen to fruitless arguments concerning weights, distances and wholly mythical dangers; to cope with the inevitable delays, postponements and false starts; or the religious conviction of the native that the camels are being overdriven, the marches are too long, all shade is meant for immediate repose and nineteen hours out of the twenty-four for sleep, talk or just "fuddling," which is a blend of both. In fact, I shall never be a first-class traveller, because I want to hurry the East.



## CHAPTER II

### BREAKING A LANCE WITH LIFE—(*continued*)

THE winter of 1918-19 was, I consider, the turning point of my life. Undine and I returned to a London more maddened by peace than it had ever been by war. For a month or two I was caught by this craze for "having a good time," but I never could stand promiscuous kissing, or the half-way landings of flirtation. I never want to drink unless I am bored, and I saw no point in breakfasting at chilly coffee-stalls in the dawn, sleeping fitfully all morning, and waking with a headache and a frock to mend.

It occurred to me that Paris and the Peace Conference offered a chance of employment. I spent a third of my fortune on a ticket, a third on the rent of a couple of rooms in the Rue de Surennes, and, counting my remaining wealth, decided I could just hold out a month. After that, the deluge!

So it behoved me to find a job. This was difficult, because a Frenchman will always trust a woman with his heart and, incidentally, his digestion, since, in Paris, according to the restaurateurs "L'appetit vient en aimant," rather than with any share of his work.

I walked miles between newspaper offices, whose rulers offered me everything I didn't want, in a scale ascending with my obvious disinclination, and I lived on two rolls and one egg a day.

It is unpleasant being hungry, even through obstinacy, and, in my budgeting, I had forgotten such

necessities as soap, tooth-powder, and shoe-polish, so I was immensely relieved when, just as I was meditating cutting the egg out of my daily menu, an editor took it into his head to desire some articles on French colonization in North Africa. When I had convinced him that I alone could write them, I ordered about half a yard of steak at the nearest "Durand," ate it lovingly, wired to Undine at the editor's expense and, with her, departed for Morocco.

We entered Africa at Casablanca, on the Atlantic coast, and, eight months later, I left it at Massawa, some thousand miles away on the Red Sea. This time our partnership was not so successful. Undine's ambition was still confined to "seeing things." I wanted to "know things," which is the second stage of the traveller's evolution. Previously we had taken it in turn to learn sufficient of the local dialects to be able to repeat: "I insist on going to," "Wash everything everywhere at once," and "It's much too early to stop." When I began to study Arabic seriously, Undine wisely gave me her blessing and what remained of her camp-outfit, after which she returned to England, married, and provided me with a most attractive godson.

With my mind full of grammar and vague ambitions, I arrived in Khartoum, where the Intelligence people decided I was malleable material. They suggested that, since I was going through Abyssinia, I should compile a route report for them and add any other information I could pick up concerning gun-running, slave-trading, or secret societies.

They evidently reported favourably to Cairo, for, when I arrived there en route for Damascus, at that moment the debatable ground between the ambitions of France and England, and the limelit capital of Feisul's first Arab kingdom, I was approached by the

Secret Service. They asked me to acquire certain information and, simultaneously, assured me that I had neither official standing nor support. Feeling like the villainess of a detective novel, I started for Palestine.

At the frontier I learned, in common with everyone else in the train, that owing to the Easter riots in Jerusalem (it was 1920) all passports had been cancelled. Amidst the indignant protests of my fellow travellers, I remained silent, and, when a young and harassed officer apologized for sending me back to Cairo, I smiled.

"Thank goodness," I said. "I'm delighted. I didn't want to come, but the powers-that-be insisted."

He looked puzzled.

"Are you on a mission? If so——" but I interrupted and denied the suggestion vehemently enough to convince him of its truth. Heading briskly for the Cairo train, in spite of his protests, I asked:

"By the way, do you mind just writing something to say you sent me back, or I shall get into awful trouble at H. Q."

This decided the young man, and, disregarding my simulated reluctance, he almost pushed me into a troop-train for the North.

I found Damascus full of the spies of different nations. As they all knew each other, they had long ago agreed to pool information. The only people who were not suspicious of me—for what business could a young, well-dressed woman have in the storm centre of the Middle East?—were the Arabs. Among them I found friends, so much so that, after a few weeks, I was torn between two loyalties. Fortunately, I was able to warn my chief of the impending massacre at Deir-er-Zor. With that piece of information I wiped out all sense of obligation to the West, re-

signed my nebulous position, and threw in my lot with the Arab nationalists.

I saw the youth of a new-born country fighting for its salvation against the overwhelming odds represented by European ambition, and, because of my whole-hearted enthusiasm, I gained a certain influence in its councils.

The question was whether to appeal to force and attack the solitary French battalion at Beirut, or to trust to diplomacy and the intervention of the Peace Conference, which was then discussing the unpopular question of mandates.

I remember one morning in Damascus, when the hotel was crowded with desert men in abbayas, some with roses behind their ears in contrast to the rifles slung across their shoulders and the varied weapons stuck in their sashes. Rizza Pasha, the Prime Minister, came to see me in the middle of lunch and he looked so worn and sad that I thought he was ill. "I am too old for politics," he said; "I've done my best, but, unless the impossible happens, there will be war to-morrow."

Knowing the retribution that would inevitably follow overt hostility, I protested "War with France would mean disaster."

The minister looked up with a gleam of his old force. "You do believe that, honestly? So do I; but, in the face of the united opinion of the country, I am no longer justified in holding out."

"You have many supporters," I said, thinking of the gallant visionaries who saw in Allenby's defeat of Turkey, the realization of a thrice promised Syrian independence.

"One by one they are leaving me. Even Tewfik Moufarrij is wavering. He is to make a speech this evening and nobody knows whether it will be for



peace or war." The old man struck his hand on the table: "I've given all that is in me to this country and they call me a traitor because I will not advise immolation on the bayonets of France!"

A few hours later Tewfik Moufarrij rushed in, young, violent, carried away by his own enthusiasm. "I spoke for peace, but it was unpopular and I was nearly shouted down till my eloquence mastered them," he exclaimed.

It was a dramatic day, full of rumours. At last, inspired by the confidence of these Arabs, who had been our allies and to whom I was bitterly conscious England would not fulfil her pledges at the cost of a quarrel with France, I found myself in the rostrum at Parliament House, making an impassioned if ungrammatical appeal for peace and a better understanding with the Quai D'Orsay.

The extremist leaders—elderly sheikhs who knew no argument but force—were too amazed to protest. The young nationalists, pale and serious in European suits surmounted by the fez, with a sprinkling of Bedouins and old-fashioned Moslems in Arab dress, listened and asked questions. This speech sealed my responsibility towards the Middle East.

I remember discussing the situation, after a dinner at Feisul's temporary palace, with an American who was doing relief work.

"I'm all for Wilson's self-determination, myself," he said; "but are you sure that's what's got you? Is it nothing to do with that handsome young king!"

When I was in America two years ago, a reporter, who had dissected me from my soul to my rubber toothbrush, ended his two columns with "Is Rosita more interested in herself or in the Arabs?" Had he been in Damascus in 1920, he would have known the answer, for the spirit that Washington recognized at

Valley Forge I saw in Syria, fighting for her existence, back against the wall, and I prayed for the eventual evolution of a United States of Arabia, as her first President prayed for America.

It was on behalf of the Arabs that I first ventured as a journalist and lecturer. In order to write with greater authority, I started my expeditions into technically unknown regions. During the winter of 1920-21 I crossed the Libyan desert, disguised as a Bedouin, with the object of discovering the secrets of the Senussi, a fiercely fanatical sect whose country had always been a blank spot on the North African map. As I was lucky enough to reach Kufara, the hitherto mysterious fastness of the sect, a certain amount of public interest was aroused.

Government cars met me on my return; an official reception awaited me. Telegrams greeted me at every point.

"What does it feel like to be successful?" asked a general who came out to welcome me. I stared at him blankly, for I was aching to get back to the desert and I'd never felt so desolately lonely in my life.

Of course, there was a reaction. Cairo, seen for the first time, is a city of enchantment, and I was surrounded by glamour. Generous officialdom paid me the homage of knowledge and the rest of the world that of curiosity.

I was up to my ears in work; a book to be written, a geographical paper compiled, reports demanded by half-a-dozen departments, pressmen and photographers clamouring at my door. One even hid in my wardrobe and was revealed, shamefaced, but insistent on the interview hitherto refused, when I opened the door to get a coat.

Publishers and editors cabled from England: "Come home. Your story is getting cold"; but I didn't care.

and, perhaps just because I minded so little, fortune stayed her steps to greet me on my long-delayed arrival in London. I was summoned to Buckingham Palace to tell my story to a sympathetic King and Queen. I sat on a sofa between them, with my only map spread across my knees and, as each pulled it, whenever they wanted to see more of my route, I remember I was dreadfully afraid it would be torn. I was also rather ashamed of the scarlet heels to my shoes, which I kept well hidden under the seat.

I dined with solemn societies and lectured on learned platforms. I received gold medals and was received by governors and universities in more European countries than I had hitherto considered. A national testimonial was presented to me in the form of an autograph book, headed by the signature "Edward P." In fact, it would all have been as enchanting as it was surprising and exciting, had it not been obvious that some of my hosts bitterly regretted I was not a man.

I could sympathize with the type of mentality which said: "Oh, of course, it's all a fraud! Such a journey is impossible," because it is agreeable and comforting to deny everything outside one's own dimension. But I could not understand those who sought to find masculine explanation for a feminine exploit.

I soon came to the conclusion that success is apt to be as full of prickles as a fully-grown hedgehog. The first of anything is so terribly, intimately, important to oneself—one's first house, one's first love, one's first grown-up job. Kufara was my first attempt at exploration.

In common with most of the eager band of young officials scattered across North Africa, I'd talked about this secret place and dreamed of it, but, unlike them, I'd devoted many months to the practical planning of

an expedition. I'd paid for it out of a very shallow pocket and organized it in every detail, step by step, alone and unaided.

It was natural, therefore, that I should suffer exaggerated agonies when I overheard a masculine suggestion that I'd invented the whole story, or the feminine comment: "Her complexion's proof that she's never been to Africa!"

Even in 1927 there is much feeling, chiefly masculine, against a woman venturing into those spheres which, for centuries, have been marked "Strictly preserved. All feminine trespassers will be prosecuted."

A chance conversation overheard in a club convinced me that it's no use worrying about negative criticism. Each human being is responsible to but one bar of judgment—his own.

Two men were talking, unconscious of the listener sunk in a deep arm-chair.

One was young and keen. "That was a good journey of Rosita's."

"Um, yes," replied the other, an African governor and a stranger, who yet had been the first to write me his congratulations on what he called "an achievement of the first water." "But, of course, there must have been a man at the bottom of it. Doubtless he got his quid pro quo." In the circumstances of heat, sweat, dirt, thirst, starvation and exhaustion, to which, unconsciously, he referred, the suggestion was so ludicrous that I could only laugh. The more I thought of it, the more I laughed, and the last scars of my sensitiveness were healed.

Repetition is stale. There were other expeditions, other receptions, and, of course, lots of other sceptics. There were also two most signal failures.

One was not my fault. I had arranged to attempt



the crossing of a certain waterless desert—last mystery of a well-mapped world—with one of the foremost travellers of our age. We were to meet at a given place. I reached it within the arranged time and waited a month on the edge of beyond, but my fellow venturer never arrived, and I learned later that the Government had put down its foot, threatening him with loss of his pension if he embarked on an enterprise it considered suicidal.

The other failure, an abortive attempt to do the Meccan pilgrimage, was due, partly to a boat upsetting in Jedda harbour, which circumstance robbed me of my thin disguise, and partly, I believe, to my own carelessness, for, though I had studied every detail of Islamic custom, I washed my feet in the wrong way before the evening prayers!

My next venture was planned in the middle of Ascot races, where my amusement in a series of absurdly large hats was disturbed by a letter from my publisher:—

“I want to get the autobiography of the brigand Raisuli before Abdel Krim murders him!”

This time I planned my campaign with meticulous care. The difficulty was sufficiently to rouse the interest of this Sultan of the Moroccan mountains for him to allow me to penetrate his guarded borders. The Spanish Ambassador told me that for years this amazing man—prophet, warrior, and politician—had subscribed for European press-cuttings, so I invited a reporter to tea and confided to him in the strictest secrecy that I was going to Morocco on a secret mission. The newspaper man swore no word should pass his lips, and next day, of course, it was blazoned in half-a-dozen papers.

How the press laughed at me for the publicity of my “secret embassy!” But the trick was successful,

for Raisuli heard of my supposed mission and sent his cousin, Mulai Sadiq, to meet me at Tetuan.

"What is your object in coming here?" asked this old man.

"That I can only reveal to Raisuli," I returned, and, after some days' arguing, I was escorted up to the mountains to see the last of the brigand kings. He, too, asked: "What is your mission?" and, with my heart in my dusty riding boots, I answered: "To write your life, my master."

The monstrous man was amused, and for weeks I lived in a black and white tent at the edge of a forest, wrote all morning at my host's dictation, weeded, classified and edited all evening. The result was a study of a typical Eastern mentality, profound, yet childish, subtle, cruel, and philosophical; and, because I had neither added nor subtracted, the reviewers ceased from commenting on my "originality and intrepidity," and congratulated me on a "masterly interpretation," which, of course, was really Raisuli's.

It was in the winter after my Moroccan adventure, 1924-5, that I visited America, professionally. I was in the States for four months and I enjoyed life enormously, gave a vast number of lectures, was thoroughly spoiled by the kindest-hearted race in the world, and got my first constructive criticism. I wanted an editor to publish some articles on Palestine. They were self-conscious and full of purple adjectives.

"Do you think Lizzie would understand?" he asked quizzically, and added: "You know there are more Lizzies in the world than anyone else, and it's her type of mind you've got to get at." I rewrote those articles and I never forgot the comment.

A Middle-Western editor, who had ordered some travel articles, told me that my facts read too much like fiction. Now an aeroplane or mass production

on a rolling-belt would sound more incredible to Central Arabia than tales of desert adventure would to Chicago, but I duly registered:—"Lizzie must not only understand. She must be convinced."

A moment later the editor asked: "How did you get that scar on your neck?"

An Arab bullet had been responsible, but with Lizzie in mind, I replied: "An accident." It was—on my part, of course, not on the marksman's.

Another editor showed me a magazine article. "The first two pages of this are wasted," he said. "Don't talk about what you're going to write—write it."

At the time I was too rushed to take advantage of such lessons, but I did begin to realize that selling an article or a story is much like trading in anything else.

I had never learned my job. So far, writing had been merely the chronicling of my expeditions, or the expression of political beliefs. Now I must begin all over again, suiting production to demand.

America did me this excellent service, but I never understood her. She remained more mysterious than the desert, and I left her, puzzled, and quite determined to return as soon as possible to seek the clue. Take one instance:

I've always found that Americans give and demand solid information. My lecture audiences, fellow-guests at public dinners, strangers who spoke to me on Pullmans, business men and women I met, always asked me pertinent and sound questions. Therefore, when reporters began their interviews: "Now, Mrs. Forbes, go right ahead—we Americans are very interested in Arabia," I used, conscientiously, to give a digest of Arab life and conditions. The reporter would listen politely, and, when I had finished, he would wake up,

pull out a pencil and say: "Now let's down to the sheeks!"

The result would be a headline: "Rosita a bad girl. Says sheeks are bums." Or; "Sheeks as tame as kittens says girl-explorer!"

In revolt, I wrote a paper on "The Position of the Arabs in Art and Literature" for the Royal Society of Arts as soon as I returned to England. Lord Askwith, with chivalrous exaggeration, referred to it as "a monument of learning." My pet special writer described my "Rosita-coloured" frock at length and said, with candour, that I had delivered myself of "an hour's stodge, which even my charming, little-girl smile could not relieve." I was presented with a much coveted medal and I felt I'd let off a lot of mental steam.

Thereafter I set about practising my American-born resolutions. I went to a friendly editor and announced that I wanted to learn journalism.

"All right," he said, and, since I insisted on criticism, my writing showed a considerable decrease of words and a slight increase of ideas.

Then, one day, I wanted to do an article on Abdel Krim, the Riffian patriot. "No good," said my editor; "but I wish to goodness you could produce one on Reza Khan—he'll be Shah before we can turn round."

"I'll go to Persia to-morrow to see him," I suggested, and the doubt in the editorial eye goaded me to make good my bluff.

It took me three weeks and a hundred pounds to each Bushira, where I was lucky enough to find the Dictator who had begun life as a stable-boy. I cabled the interview to an amused paper.

After that I picked up a camera man and went to Abyssinia, as I thought it would be a new experience to make a travel film. We rode through a three-



thousand-year-old country, saw the ruined capital of the Queen of Sheba and the underground red-rock city of Lalibela, fraternized with a tribe of leaden-skinned troglodytes living among the mountains, scrapped with brigands, outwitted crocodiles and the local authorities, and eventually emerged, battered and in rags, with a book of adventures and 11,000 feet of film.

This time, success was unpunctuated by disappointment. I had learned how much and how little it counted. I could accept the presence of the Powers-that-be at the private view of "Red Sea to Blue Nile," as unemotionally as the question of a delicious American tourist whom I met later in Switzerland:

"I saw your picture and I am so anxious to know how much of it was done on location?"

A few months later I received a letter from an unknown correspondent in Manchester; "I do like reading your travel books," it said, "but, just when I am all excited over an adventure, I come upon pages of archæology and geography. Please, Mrs. Forbes, do write one book that is all adventure, with no information in it at all."

Another writer, a Scot who evidently liked to pigeon-hole his impressions, sent me a list of questions—"What is the most terrible thing you've ever seen? What is the most beautiful place in the world? What is the most dangerous thing you've ever done? When were you most afraid? When were you most angry?"

I would like to answer some of those queries in this record of a dozen years' adventuring, but I've never been able to label my experiences. Nobody can, because their value is always shifting. The "most terrible" is always the thing that very nearly happens, that you just don't see. There was once a play in

Paris called "The Closed Door." Two murderers were talking of how they had killed their victim in a neighbouring room.

Suddenly the communicating door swung open. Strung to a pitch of fear I've never seen in a theatre, the audience expected something incredibly horrible to come through it. Nothing did. If it had, there would have been anticlimax, for no effect of make-up could have been as terrible as imagination pictured.

It is the same in life. What you imagine you're going to see is so much more horrible than what you actually see.

The most beautiful, or the most wonderful thing in the world is the thing you only see once. When I first visited Fez, the centuries-old capital of Morocco, I thought it was the jewel of all time. From one of the encircling hills which guard it, below the watch-towers of the Merinide Sultans, we gazed at a white city, like a cluster of pearls set in emerald. The murmur of the vine-roofed markets drifted up to us like the hum of a monstrous bee-hive. The minarets of the hundred mosques, slender as spears, tiled with jade, pierced a jumble of old palace roofs. It was a tapestry of age and history and romance—veiled women on the balconies; burdened camels padding through a labyrinth; the old houses leaning together whispering of dead secrets, above the cobbled, twisting paths. "It is the most beautiful place in the world," I said. Since then I have been to Fez many times. I know its secrets and its reticences.

But I have only been once to Bangkok, the golden capital of Siam, so it is still, to me, the most beautiful thing in the world. I remember its royal white elephants passing solemnly between a shoal of scarlet rickshaws, and its mass of brilliant uniforms. There are canals, down whose tree-shadowed waters drift

rice-junks, house-boats and butterfly-sailed sampans. There are mysterious markets, with dragon-carved gates and odd forgotten temples, where alligators lie in pools and priestesses tell fortunes with joss sticks. There are the "wats," palace-temples, whose glory beggars description. Domed jewels they are, ablaze with crystal and precious metals, fairy-tale structures, whose tall towers are too slight to withstand a zephyr, whose walls are strange-named marbles. Their courts are paved with ivory, their roofs gem-studded, and all this amidst a bewildering fantasy of carving, of stone giants and Gorgons, priests, beasts and Buddhas.

Yes, Bangkok is the most exquisite place in the world, but I shall never go back to make sure.

"Were you never afraid?" is the first question that reporters ask a traveller, returned from the back-of-beyond and, of course, one has to make up an answer, because they will not believe the truth, that one is constantly afraid, but never when one really ought to be! I expect I've been most terrified in a haunted room, in a New York taxi-cab, or in a thunder-storm when the window blind tapped. One is always frightened of things over which one has no control, or against which one has no fighting chance. "From all ghaisties and ghoulies and long-leggity beasties and things that go bump in the night, good Lord deliver us," says the Scottish Litany and I agree with it.

Adventure means something different to each one of us. The most dangerous thing I've ever done—and it was an exceedingly idiotic thing—was to sail a twenty-foot open dhow across the Red Sea in the teeth of the winter gales, with a crew of eight Arabs, only one of whom had ever done the journey before; but I wasn't frightened because, during that nightmare fortnight, I was too busy and, incidentally, too seasick!

The red sand walls of Marrakesh, sprawling at the foot of the Atlas like a wounded leviathan, stand to me for adventure. So does Figuié at sunset, its earthen towers piled above a froth of almond blossom and palms, or flying into Helsingfors above the clouds, the thousand islands of the Gulf of Finland seen through the wrack like jewels in cotton-wool, yet nothing ever happened to me in any of these places.

Sometimes adventures are clear-cut and, looking back, one sees them as solitary and dramatic incidents, without particular prelude or sequence. More often they are threads in the web of circumstance, glimpses of strange people in strange places, a sudden insight into character, a new point of view, or the readjustment of an old one.

It is "the lust of knowing what should not be known" that sends us all adventuring, whether in Fleet Street or Turkestan, and, to every genuine buccaneer, all is grist that comes to his mill.

"When are you going to settle down?" was the last of my Scot's questions and the one which this book makes no pretence of answering. It is always "next year," but that particular year never comes. I hope I shall always be a lover of life and the unexpected, a servant of chance, but a master of opportunity. Perhaps I shall settle down when "the soles of my feet stop itching," as the Arabs say of the wanderer.



## CHAPTER III

### RAISING THE DEAD

IT happened where Algeria runs south into the great desert. Somewhere beyond the dunes the solitary French fort of Djannet administers a district the size of England, but the village of Msus is tucked away in a palm grove right off the edge of the map. From the old deserted tracks which bore the slave trade of Africa between Nigeria and the Mediterranean the crenellated mud walls have the effect of a citadel. In reality, they are no more formidable than the goats which skip from roof to roof in the place of armed warriors who once searched the horizon for the caravans on which they preyed.

Msus must be one of the poorest villages in the Sahara. I arrived there on a bitter December day with half a dozen camels, so parched that their humps hung like sacks. There was a wadi among the palms, but no cheery crowd gathered round the beasts as they bellowed, snarling and fighting, churning the coveted water into mud. A solitary driver piped the song of the drinking camel, "Adari—ayan, oh weary ones. You have arrived," as the villagers trickled out of their windowless, roofless houses, to stand in groups of two or three, hollow-eyed and painfully emaciated. The date harvest had been comparatively good, but, with their usual thriftlessness, the Saharans, who live by this one crop and whatever milk their lean, long-uddered goats can spare, had eaten the last of the fruit before the flaying winds began, and now,

in the most pitiless season, were pounding the stones to make flour and stewing bark for gruel.

Msus was suspicious of strangers, and I had to trickle gold pieces casually between my fingers before the headman offered a lodging. In silence he led us into the village, crumbled as an old ants' nest. The wind whipped round the corners, flaying our skins. Sand spirals flurried up from the hollows, drumming into our ears, so that we felt heavy-headed and bewildered.

My only recollection of that apparently interminable shuffle through a labyrinth of mud dwellings, deteriorating here and there into tunnels, was a splash of vivid scarlet among the drab, wind-blistered whiteness. It was the barracan of an old, old, woman, whose face was like brown taffeta, accordion-pleated round the reddish puddles that were her eyes. Her chin hung like a full net and her teeth were yellowed chessmen stuck haphazard in her gums. She had a curious oblique gaze and her fingers were so fleshless that I imagined them crooked as talons; but the rest of her was invisible under a weight of metal jewellery, cheap certainly, but unexpected in a place where even the sheikh could boast no other ornament than the patches in his stained woollen jerd.

"It is the Mother of Time," vouchsafed our reluctant host, "and Wallahi, my father's grandfather, could not tell when she first lived."

As no desert Arab has any conception of age, and as they are a short-lived people, inured to death as to every other hardship of their fruitless and aimless existence, I imagined the woman would seem to them passing old when an English dowager was just wondering if she ought to give up dancing with her granddaughters' partners, but she intrigued me.

After much delay, my caravan was lodged in a

sort of hive whose cells tumbled pell-mell into an irregular, blind-walled court. Palm trunks supported the sagging roofs and torn frond mats covered the earth, but of furniture there was none, and even the utensils were made of clay—a row of henna-stained jars on the hearth, where incense smoke hung like a thin blue arrow, and a few platters and bowls ranged along the least damaged wall. But always, just outside the door, where the wintry sunshine fought with the wind, the Mother of Time sat motionless. During the three weeks I waited for my camels' backs to harden, I never saw the crone come or go. She just was there always and immutably. Whether she was chaperone or jailer I never knew, but I liked her crude vermilion with their promise of hotter, more fecund lands, and I liked her voice, thinner than the rattle of reeds, and so tired that she seemed to drag it syllable by syllable out of immeasurable distances. She told me odd, impossible stories of witchcraft, and the black magic, by which clean men wither into leprosy.

One night, I remember, I was hunched on the floor in the least draughty corner, a camel-hair blanket over my shoulders, eating with my fingers a paste made of flour, red pepper, and a little oil, and alas, liberally flavoured with the sand that permeates every Saharan meal. It was a nasty mess, and inadequate even to my cloistered hunger—I had not moved out of the house for a week, and I had just remembered the date. On that particular evening, perhaps even at that moment, there would be Christmas trees at home and plum pudding, with that hard brandy-and-cream sauce that has always been my undoing! My mouth watered. Viciously I rolled the remaining "asida" into a ball, gulped it down, and, through the gloom, which seemed to crouch in the corner like hunting beasts, I saw the old woman watching me.

Her eyes were always shuttered and very secret, but in the flicker of a single tallow candle, stuck in a long-necked jar, they appeared opaque. She spoke of a wedding and a reluctant bride, while her fingers stiffened into the sort of fantastic claws one sees in old Egyptian frescoes. Selmag was the girl's name, and she was unwise enough to love a merchant who, having missed the way like myself, had lodged for a month in her father's house. Msus is too uncivilized to trouble about veiling its daughters. There is little chance of any stranger seeing them, and, long ago, every family must have attained sufficient degree of consanguinity with its neighbour to justify familiarity. Consequently the merchant was able to indulge a whim for the keen-featured, clear-eyed Berber, less unwieldy in mind and body than the harem women of the coast, but, at the end of it—and there was certainly no more in it than words, glances, a sigh or two, and the pressure of a fugitive hand—he rode away. Selmag, before she accepted the skinny labourer of her father's choice, would know if her prince were likely to return.

"Can you not tell her by the sands?" I asked idly enough, for, at that moment, the only prediction that would have interested me would have been one concerning my own instantaneous translation to England, turkey and log fires.

"Only the dead can tell with certainty," returned the crone, and, in spite of myself, I shivered. No Moslem willingly speaks of the dead. He says: "Those who have gone"; but the hag in scarlet plunged at once into the explanation of her words, and she called a spade a spade with such vigour that I longed for more candles.

Every shadow was inimical and the wind, rustling at the edges of the mat, was perverse as a mating serpent. I watched the light anxiously. If it went out,



a hundred shapes would spring on to me from each watchful corner. I should scream—I knew it.

But the old woman, unmoved, told how, three days ago, a girl had died and been buried on the edge of the desert with a stone at her head and a stone at her feet, and a third across her heart, “because it takes more to keep a woman down than a man.” Tomorrow it would be full moon, and, since the spirit of a virgin lingers for seven days beside the tents or huts of the tribe to which she has given no life in exchange for her own, Selmag, if she had the courage, might go out into a world of molten silver and ask her question of the dead.

The reed-like voice drifted into silence and the candle guttered horribly. I heard myself saying, “I shall go with her,” though the last thing in the world I wanted was to dabble in African magic.

The crone looked at me without expression. “A woman has no fate but that which a man writes for her,” she said, implying that, as I was already married, the future could hold no further interest for me. However, the following afternoon, while I was mending what remained of my riding-breeches, she brought Selmag to see me, with the result, of course, that I found myself pledged to the night’s adventure. In the misty star-rise we shuffled out of the village, the Berber girl so nervous that she stumbled with irritating regularity. A dozen muffled figures crept after us, and I found myself instinctively tightening the folds of my borrowed barracan. I did not want to be seen, and I was not at all sure that I wanted to see. In any case, I comforted myself with what I believed unassailable fact. Of course, there would be, there could be, nothing to see.

But the night was eerie; the palm branches made a patchwork quilt which seemed to heave up and down

as though leviathan shapes struggled under it. The wind cackled to itself among the wrack, and there was a queer drumming which might have been insect or animal, but which sounded like the beating of the earth's pulses.

Shivering, we waited at the edge of the palm-grove, and I thought the crone in scarlet regarded us with a certain malice. Selmag huddled against a trunk with fixed eyes and parted lips. Once or twice her hand brushed mine and I found myself muttering: "Matek-hafish—don't be afraid. There is nothing;" but I was not certain if her answering glance held appeal or protest.

At last the moon burst out of the horizon with the effect of a flower splitting its calyx. Like some incredible fire-balloon loosed from a string, it hung above the dunes, and, slowly, their silvered rims spread till the whole desert was a pool of molten metal. The group of women quavering out from the trees was like flotsam, and I had the absurd idea that I should see it swept away. The cemetery strayed along the edge of the sands and, as we moved silently between the stones, a dog howled in the village. I am sure at that moment every notch in my spine stood up, as prickly as a porcupine's quills.

"The Mother of Time" motioned us into a circle, and I had a passionate desire to fling myself face downward, grovelling, blind-eyed, as the other women did, but a sense of the ridiculous kept me upright.

Precisely as if she were hollowing the usual desert oven, the hag began scraping at a newly-made grave. The sand spun through her fingers, and the little stones crackled as they fell. I was perhaps twenty yards away, but I saw her lift something white and stiff out of the hole, and, immediately, she began singing a weird little whisper of cadence, dry as the lips which formed it.

Now, there are all sorts of explanations for what follows, hypnotism or a trick, hallucination, fever, or optical illusion. The fact remains that I saw the old woman bend over the body as if she would breathe into it the last frenzy of her strength. I saw the dead girl move. Imagination, I told myself bitterly, but the crone went away, and, though I blinked till my eyes watered and dug my nails into my palms, the figure she had lifted from the sand remained in a sitting position. It was so swathed in dust-coloured wool that all I could see was a triangle of leaden skin barred by the darker tints of eyebrows and lips. The eyes seemed to be sealed by the shadows beneath them. The old woman said something sharply, and Selmag crept across the circle on hands and knees like an animal. I wondered if she dared look at the thing she approached, and her question was inaudible. Presumably she asked if her merchant lover would return, for I am certain I saw the lips of the dead girl move and I thought I heard her speak. Negligible in life, but, for this one moment, priestess of her tribe, I believed she uttered the phrase which made her kinswoman double in the sand, "Huyarah—he is gone." The sound was as if it were piercing innumerable barriers, and it struck me, even at that terrifying moment, that I grasped it with some other sense than hearing.

In a moment the whole thing was finished. While Selmag still writhed on the ground, her barracan over her head, the swathed figure collapsed, and, immediately, the crone lifted it back into the grave. It was while she was shovelling in the first handfuls of sand that the reasonable explanation dawned on me. Catalepsy! I was watching a burial of the living.

I am not quite certain what I said or how I staggered across the circle, but one glance at the peace

of the dead face convinced me. Nothing so immeasurably remote, so satisfactorily "finished" with itself, could have any further connexion with the earth, to which, perhaps, it had been recalled for an instant by a kinswoman's need. Involuntarily I found myself on my knees, muttering with the rest; but I did not know to what gods I prayed.

When the sand had been smoothed and the three stones replaced, we crept back into the palm grove, silent except for the moans of Selmag. Each alley, tunnelling between its mud walls, absorbed one or more of the women who had been limelit by the swollen moon, and at last, alone, I found myself on the threshold of my house. I doubled into it like a hunted rabbit, and blessed Ahmed, the student-cook who was working his way to a Cairo University, for his habit of snoring! Each gulp trumpeted a reassuring normality through the air, and, as I struggled with the heavy wooden lock, whose key was like a shoe-horn, I told myself: "Well, that was all excellently stage-managed. Now, of course, Selmag will marry the suitor approved by her father and that ghastly old woman will get her doubtless prearranged baksheesh."

The next instant I remembered the meaning any Berber would attach to those words, "He has gone." Selmag would be convinced that her lover was dead. Hurriedly I whisked into the room where my blankets were spread. Ahmed's snores were no longer sufficient shield against the supernatural. I broke my last candle into three pieces, and lit each one.

A fortnight later, as we plodded north across the last bad stretch of dunes, our guide, Mohammed, told us of a sandstorm which had altered the whole contour of the belt.

"Allah be pitiful! It is said that more than one caravan was lost in it."



The next day, searching for the natural alley which should lead us north, we came upon a stiffened group. With an unemotional, "Allah give them peace," our guide bent over the victims of the storm. By its amulets he recognized the thing that had once been Selmag's lover.

The story of that night, when the full moon was like a flower, must have been whispered through the village, for Mohammed's eyes met mine. They were old and wise and simple. "All knowledge is with Allah," he said and, after a long pause, "sometimes it is very strange."

## CHAPTER IV

### BLACK MAGIC

**B**LACK MAGIC is as old as history. Innumerable witches have been burned because a "murrain"—probably foot and mouth disease—fell on their neighbour's cattle. I remember, when I was a child, the village policeman solemnly asking my grandfather—a J.P.—to sign a warrant against a bel-dame, who had "overlooked" his brother's sheep.

In the Highlands I was taken to see a "wise woman," whose neighbours firmly believed she had killed a rival by making a little wax figure of her and sticking pins into its heart.

Such superstition is most prominent in Italy or Spain, where to say a man has the "evil eye," is to excommunicate him. However rich and powerful he may be, no one will have any dealings, business or social, with him; and, if they are forced to pass him in the street, they make the sign of horns, secretly, so as not to annoy him.

In the East, of course, where superstition is closely interwoven with religion, custom and tradition, the evil eye is too potent a factor in everyday life to be dismissed as "imagination." I first came in contact with it in Fiji, where certain villages have a bad name, because they not only practise black magic, but have "devil-houses," specially erected by its devotees and shunned by the terrified uninitiated.

I was trekking up into the mountains with another girl, and, towards nightfall, we came to a comfortable-

looking village, where I proposed to stay. Our guides, who, for hours, had protested against the length of the march, point-blank refused to camp.

"It is an evil place," they said. "All bad men who make magic," and, in spite of our protests, they hurried us away.

The result was a night spent wandering round and up a narrow, almost invisible, hill path, which appeared to hang over the edge of space. The guides were quite unruffled till, turning a corner, we came upon a very old man with a rag round his waist, seated on a boulder. The moon had risen, and we could see his matted white hair and a pair of odd, opaque-looking eyes, which, without being blind, had the appearance of looking only inward.

With a wail of terror—the most ridiculous sound I have ever heard from grown men—one guide bolted past the old man and the other, with our porters, doubled back and was not seen again till the next day.

I learned afterwards that we had met the chief local magician.

"What nonsense it all is!" I said, foolishly, to the Resident with whom we stayed on the mountain top.

"I don't know about that," returned the Englishman, staring out at his garden, ablaze with flowers. "He nearly got me."

"What?" we gasped. . . .

Here is the story as nearly as I can remember it after ten years.

The Resident had been summoned to a certain village to deal with spells which were laying waste crops and flocks. In such circumstances, a British official is father and prophet and deity combined, so he did his best to frighten the old magician into better behaviour, at the same time assuring the villagers there was nothing to fear. The matter ended with the wise-

acre threatening the Resident that he would put him under a spell—the actual word is “draunikow.” The Englishman laughed. “It’s a bargain, then; but if you fail, you’ve got to let these people alone.”

The old man agreed and the official continued his journey towards the plain, with an escort gloomily prepared for the worst.

Evening came, and a chief offered lodging in his haystack hut. The Resident had forgotten all about the challenge and was too preoccupied to notice the growing terror of his servants. He went to sleep on his camp-bed, placed in a corner, and awoke to a feeling of suffocation. There were no windows in the hut, only a low door, through which faint starlight gleamed, yet the place seemed lighted. A cloud of something faintly phosphorescent hung a few feet from the ground. The Englishman stared at it, not frightened, but gasping for breath. He tried to move, failed, and began a terrible struggle with limbs which he could not control. The sweat poured down him, but he could not even cry out. He thought he had fever, and did not connect his sufferings with the old magician till, suddenly, the light materialized into a face with livid, opaque eyes.

“They drained everything out of me,” the Resident told us. “I knew then what I was up against. I set my teeth and fought.”

“You won?”

“After what seemed like hours. It left me as weak as a cat—I never want to go through it again.”

A similar experience happened to me some years later in the Sahara. For a fortnight I had been travelling with a merchant caravan, whose leader looked with more than favour upon my little black slave, Hauwa. His wife, Fatma, was jealous, and soon my servant began to complain of strange pains.



"There is a serpent inside me which eats my heart," she said.

The attacks synchronized with dawn and sunset, so, knowing something of harem intrigue, I suspected poison.

One night, when Hauwa was twisted with pain, which neither poultices nor massage could remedy, I went to Fatma's tent.

It had been set a little apart, and, in spite of the late hour, sound came from behind the closely-laced flaps. Rhythmic and low, there was something uncanny in its undercurrent of passion.

I searched for a hole between the stays. It was dark inside the tent, but a small flame burned in a hollow. By its light I saw Fatma tracing hieroglyphics in the sand. She threw herself back and forth in a frenzy of imprecation, her eyes bloodshot, her lips streaked with foam. The name of Allah did not figure in the incantation, and I remembered that, long ago, the Bedouins knew strange worship, in which black-polished stones, relic of the earliest human faith, played part. There was such a stone beside the flame, and near it the rude drawing of a human form, the essential organs marked with dots. Fatma leaned forward, her hand curved like a talon—and I fled.

At the noon halt next day, I joined the sheikh's wife.

"I saw what you were doing last night," I told her, "and if Hauwa's illness does not stop, your master shall know."

"What business is it of yours if we pray to Allah while you sleep?"

"It was not to Allah you prayed!" I retorted significantly.

Two nights later it happened. I woke suddenly, imagining fingers touched me. The tent was empty

but inchoate oppression stifled me. I remembered the Fijian story and others heard in Zululand.

"So, it's to be battle!" I said aloud.

Surely the moonlight was creeping out of the tent? I gathered all my resolution to repel the terror at my brain. I remembered Fatma, venomous over her hieroglyphics, and the inherent dominion of the West stirred my fighting blood.

A queer numbness was creeping over me. Waves of nausea shook me.

"It's absurd," I told myself, but I felt the shadows were inimical. They seemed to be pressing in on me. Something wanted to materialize. The pressure increased, till I thought my flesh would burst under the strain. I repeated grimly:

"I shall win. I must win!" till the words became an incantation on which hung Hauwa's life and my own.

Suddenly, scarcely a yard from my face, I looked at a bodyless head swaying between shadows. The glare in the eyeballs was maniacal and the mouth insensate evil. Triumph radiated from it. I felt my senses wavering, and the face moved forward, till I imagined its breath on my face. With an effort which seemed to tear all the life from my body, I lifted a hand to push back the horror. The thought flashed through what was left of my brain: "If I don't win, I shall die."

In final revolt I laughed. It was a screech, which cackled through the tent, so extraordinary a sound that I laughed again. The face disappeared. The shadows withdrew, and, struggling weakly out of my sleeping-bag, I realized that I was drenched with sweat.

In the placid days which followed, I often wondered if I had dreamed the whole thing; yet Hauwa's cure remained permanent, and there was a furtive, but very pronounced, respect in Fatma's manner.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCERNING WITCHCRAFT

**T**HROUGHOUT the East magic is a recognized and very potent factor in everyday life. Occasionally it is hereditary in certain families, but, as there are no young witches and wizards, presumably its functions cannot be exercised until power has developed with maturity. Magic is the weapon of age. Youth has no need of it. Moreover, youth plays a very small part in Eastern social life. The years, which are so galling to us, are the insignia of royalty in an East which considers wisdom and experience the most valuable of its assets. The whole of its life is based on the development of the mind rather than the body, so it is natural that it should lay claim to unusual mental powers.

The records of trials in the Middle Ages show that among those condemned to death for practising the black arts were many that were accused of murder, but which could only have been hypnotism.

This principle, which has been known to European witches throughout the centuries, and which is still practised in remote districts, is developed by the peculiar psychology of the East, where it has become the weapon of the weak against the strong—the final arbiter in the struggle for existence.

In most primitive countries the power of the chiefs is always backed by that of the local medicine man, or some wise woman, who, because he or she is an able hypnotist, with a thorough knowledge of herbal

properties, is regarded as scarcely less formidable than the deity. In Fiji, in Papua, in Zululand, I have seen different forms of "devil-houses," wherein promising neophytes are initiated by a process of alternate drug-ging and starvation, into the plastic condition wherein they became mediums of the local expert's magic, and, eventually, proficient disciples. Such "devil-houses" are held in terror by the natives, who will never pass near one if they can help it, or even spend a night in a village which contains one. Their fear and superstition make them particularly good subjects for the influence of the witch doctors, but, on several occasions, white people, originally sceptical of the magician's powers, have fallen before them.

In Zululand, in 1914, I spent a night in a kraal near Isandhlwana, and was taken, as a matter of policy, to pay my respects to the local wizard, an unprepossessing individual, deeply scored with wrinkles and tufted with unexpected hair. His servant crept about like an automaton, speechless and curiously crumpled. It was not until he came out into the light that I saw he was undoubtedly European and probably English, but his eyes were blank, with an inverted look, and he took no notice of my questions. The only information that my guide could supply was that the man had been a trader and that he had disappeared for a time, after incurring the enmity of the magician. I have come across other cases of white men going native, because they have too far entangled themselves with the bastard necromancy of the savages among whom they lived.

This witchcraft is draped in an infinity of trappings adjusted for the purpose of terrifying or deceiving the multitude, but when such properties as virginal intestines (used in Zululand), hashish and kat, the strongest drugs of Asir, or the intoxicating potions of Lasta,



are deleted, together with their adjuncts of moonlight, smoke and incantations, we come down to the hypnotism, which is a quality of all primitive peoples, and the susceptible, plastic characters of which its devotees are composed.

My own adventure in the Sahara (Chapter IV) was simply a case of individual hypnotism. The strange sight in Fatma's tent, the atmosphere of terror and dumb acceptance with which Hauwa surrounded me, the very fact that I was living an alien life, hyper-sensitive to its reactions, must have prepared me for the experience. The only curious thing is that I did not succumb.

Mass hypnotism is far more remarkable, yet it must undoubtedly be within the power of primitive magicians, because a score of villagers will bear witness to having seen the same phenomena at the same time. In Papua I was once induced to assist at such a séance. It took place on the beach, a very short distance from the semi-civilization of Port Moresby. The occasion was the return of a native trading-boat, which was followed by a sexual dance, during which men and women, closely linked, padded up and down between the whisper of wind in the palms and the surge of the surf. It was an ideal setting for witchcraft. Imagination ran riot even before the dark figures ranged themselves in a circle, almost naked, head-dresses of feathers, lobster claws and shells etched against the half-light. I have noticed that black magic, unless it is simply a trick to amuse foreigners, is always practised in circumstances where the magician can count on the maximum effect of scenery and stage properties, whether natural or artificial, on the minimum resistance offered by his audience.

On this occasion the wizard was a ghastly figure, adding a rattle of bones to the grotesqueness of white-

wash and nostrils split by reeds. He drew hieroglyphics, whirled like a top amidst a shrieked incantation, performed sufficient hocus-pocus to induce receptivity among the watchers, and then, on the top of all this nonsense, made each one of us see what appeared to be a genuine apparition. An enormous, inchoate figure loomed between us. It was monstrous in size, and its outline gradually solidified, till it represented what would be the local idea of a deity, but the proof that this was nothing more than a projection of the magician's mind, occurred to us afterwards. There had been four Europeans present, and, to prevent trickery, we had sat at different points of the circle, so that we ought logically, to have seen different aspects of the apparition. But we didn't. To each of us the thing appeared absolutely full face, as flat as a figure on a screen, and, as far as our interpreter could discover later on, each native had seen exactly what we saw.

A simpler form of mass hypnotism, but more ingenious, because it is practised in broad daylight, in any place the audience chooses, is the mango trick, which so many of us have seen in India and Ceylon. The juggler produces a basket and a mango seed. He sits down on your own veranda, scoops a little earth into a pile, plants his seed, covers it with a basket and mutters a rigmarole over it. When the basket is lifted, a small plant is seen growing out of the earth. The cover is replaced, there is more mumbling, accompanied by a pass or two, and then a fully-grown bush almost pushes the basket off its top leaves. As the juggler is semi-naked, with no possible means of hiding the plant, I thought it would be interesting to photograph the experiment. On my first attempt the conjurer failed in the trick, saying that an evil presence was working against him. My second was successful, but

the negative, exposed at the moment when the basket was lifted from the fully-grown bush, showed nothing but a small pile of earth.

When I was in India, like everyone else, I constantly heard of the rope trick, in which a juggler throws a cord into the air. It remains as stiff as a pillar and his assistant climbs up it and disappears off the top. Not only was I never able to see this trick myself, but I never met anyone who had, until King Haakon of Norway told me that it had been performed in his honour at Tunis. One of his suite took a photograph at the moment when the juggler was almost at the top of the rope, but the developed negative showed the rope and both jugglers on the ground.

The whole mental atmosphere of the East is adapted to magic, because the simplest of its actions are based on traditions whose origins are not known. Life is full of mystery, accepted with the placidity and patience of races which never attempt to explain the inevitable. How often have I inquired into the origin, scope and purpose of local witchcraft and been answered with such phrases as—"This is Abyssinian custom." "It is the will of Allah!" "It has always been this way." "How should a man know?" Inquiry is baffled by the blank wall of non-resistance, the blind fatalism which accepts everything it doesn't understand as custom or religion.

There is such a remarkable power of mind over matter all through the East, because each Moslem or each Buddhist is taught from childhood the first is vital and the second negligible, that it is hardly necessary to introduce hypnotism into a state where men can die at will. I was in India during an outbreak of plague and in Arabia during one of cholera. On both occasions I saw people die from fright, though they had not got the disease.

I have always found a well-known brand of fruit salts an almost infallible cure for Eastern ills, because a few passes made over the powder when water is added to it, invest the subsequent sizzling with that magic which is an essential part of medicinal ritual in the Orient.

The darker the magic, the more it depends not only on the simple receptivity of the people, but on the mystery with which it can contrive to enwrap itself. It is extraordinary how little the East knows of the habits which are a part of its daily life. In Yemen no woman will take a passing glance in a mirror. She must look in it full face, but she does not know this is to prevent a devil glancing into it with her, unobserved. After each prayer, the Moslem bows automatically right and left, but only the educated realize they are saluting the angels of judgment, who stand on either side to record a man's good or evil deeds. It is unlucky in Africa to shuffle into your wide, heelless slippers backwards, but it took me months to discover that this is because the ghouls walk always with their feet reversed. Before peppering the stew an Arab woman throws a pinch of salt across it, without realizing that it goes into the eye of a devil who may be anxious to eat it.

Each sex in Islam has customs about which the other knows nothing. For instance, even from the civilized harems of North Africa, at full moon, the women go out into the desert and build little cairns of stones, but what the reason is I doubt if they themselves know. In any case, their husbands don't. "It is women's custom," they say, with a tolerant shrug of the shoulders, just as they speak of "women's language," a dialect which is only known to the harems and which no male being has ever been able to understand.

The strangest customs are connected with wed-



dings. In Algeria and Tunisia, an hour before the bride leaves her house, while the marriage festivities are at their height, a man dressed as a woman, belonging to a family in which the office or privilege is hereditary, goes in alone to the bride. What he does or what he says is a secret religiously guarded and, though I have seen it happen, have seen, in more primitive harems, the disguised man rise from the ranks of ancient feminine musicians, beating audhs and drums, and go behind the screen where the bride has sat all day, the object of the ceremony is a mystery to me.

Is it remarkable that a life so interwoven with mysticism and superstition should be susceptible to any form of that magic which it has always believed to be as great a power as faith or race or motherhood?

Generally, black magic goes no further than hypnotism, based on the necessity of providing some antidote to the doctrine of physical force which would otherwise rule the world. There are, however, a few evil practitioners who pretend that they can raise the dead, which is against all the laws of Islam. There used to be one such person in the Mouskey in Cairo. He was called Sayed Ahmed, but he had no more right to the title (Sayed) than to the fantastic claims he made. It was very difficult and expensive to witness his séances, but, through an Egyptian friend, I was once admitted and, amidst every possible effect of darkness, incense-smoke and wind, all of which might have been arranged, the magician trifled with a science which he had perverted to his own uses, and raised the most horrible forms I have ever seen. My impression was that he was nearly as terrified as his audience, and when, instead of the dead sufi he had promised us, he produced an inhuman vision which towered out of the suddenly non-existent roof, he quite frankly took refuge

in prayer. I did not wait for any further manifestations.

I do not think this was hypnotism. I believe it was an inexpert dabbling in the true magianism of the East, which, for purposes of contrast, I call white magic.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HUNDRED MAGIC NAMES

THIS scientific study, which has filled libraries from Baghdad to Fez, is the philosophy of demonology, the control of space, but not of time. It does not claim to raise the dead, only to make use of their knowledge, which it considers an inexhaustible reservoir at the service of future students. It claims that all knowledge is one, and that, therefore, space has no power to separate the fellow masters of science. The sufis of the Islamic world, and the yogis of the Hindu, believe that they can, at will, project their minds to any portion of the world they wish to visit, while their bodies remain, sometimes in a trance, sometimes following their normal avocations at home. This is the explanation of the spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca, made yearly by those sages whose bodies apparently have never left their homes. I can find no theory to account for the fact that certain great teachers in the African zawiyas can tell in complete detail every incident of a pilgrimage, before anyone has yet returned from Mecca, and before they could have had communication with anyone on it. It may be some perfected form of telepathy, but they will describe the Hadj as it would have happened, or did happen, to them individually, with their rank and friends and habits, not as it would have appeared to any general pilgrim. Personally, I have seen enough of this form of "mental projection" in the East to believe such wise men, after a lifetime of self-denial, are capable of living two lives,

for longer or shorter periods, according to their knowledge.

This power is the result of an asceticism unknown in the West, even among Trappists. An example is the monastery of Koyosan on a mountain-top in Japan. It takes forty years of learning to make a Buddhist priest in this hermitage, buried among sunless pine forests, and then, as a novice said to me, "a man is at the gate of wisdom."

Boys enter the monastery at the age of eight and, seven years later, they take the first vows of the novitiate, assuming the triple cord, which symbolizes chastity, poverty and obedience. I spent a few days in the guest-house of this monastery and attended the Buddhist masses, celebrated at midnight and at dawn.

In a long, panelled room, the floor covered with very clean reed mats, the only furniture a couple of scarlet gongs and the stand for the heavy books of prayer, an enormous Buddha, its gold dimmed by age, loomed out of the shadows. Priests and novices were ranged in two long rows, cross-legged on the floor, all wrapped in the same colourless robes, as greyly yellow as their faces. Of the world these men knew nothing. From childhood they had never eaten flesh, fish or eggs, or drank milk; they had never known women; never talked of anything but religion and philosophy; never slept more than two or three hours a night. When they were not engaged in their endless studies, or in that repetitive prayer which is a direct bridge to the next world, so much more real to them than this earth, they were absorbed in contemplation of the infinite. Space, to them, is a storehouse of all good and evil, of all the thought that has preceded us. Action means nothing, for its consequences are only effective in this world, which Buddhism regards as a corridor leading to the next. Thought is eternal. It



is like a stone dropped into a pool, its ripples widening into ever farther-reaching circles of knowledge.

As I sat in a corner, listening to the drone of the mass and watching the placid, serene faces, so marked by thought that age and time had ceased to affect them at all, I realized that there was no difference in the appearance of young and old. All were livid and parchment-skinned. They were indescribably assured, for they had passed beyond all physical feeling and all mental worry. I had the idea that flesh and bone were immaterial coverings to be discarded as easily as the robes they wore. A body was no longer personal property. I felt it might be changed, thrown away, lost or forgotten, as the name which, so many years ago, had belonged to it. In Koyosan there are no names or other labels. "I am the little that I have acquired," said one of the priests, and later, when I asked him of the future, he answered, "I shall not partake of immortality, but contribute to it."

It was on the last day of my visit, when I wanted to say good-bye to my nameless host, that, for the first time, I saw the phenomenon of dual existence. In his usual corner of the temple room sat my friend, a bundle of woollen creases, with equally crinkled skin and bone slumped vacantly inside it. He paid no attention to the shuffling of my stockinged feet on the mats or to my apologetic murmurs and, presently, the novice who attended the guest-house, plucked at my sleeve. "He is not there," he said. "What do you mean?" I protested. "I can see him." "No, it is not the teacher; it is only his body." He used a word which meant "shell."

Together we went into the garden and, while the youth, who looked as old as time, explained the complete separation of body and mind achieved by study, asceticism and contemplation, I looked at the many-

finned gold-fish swimming round a pool. A minute later my priestly friend approached from the opposite direction to the room where I had seen him sitting and to which there was only one entrance immediately behind me. The figure was normal and opaque, casting a shadow. Its robes fluttered round it, brushing the plants as it passed.

"Look, the spirit of the teacher returns," said the novice and beckoned me to enter the temple room. The priest was now praying in his corner and, after he had finished his beads, he spoke to us in a voice thin as reeds, monotonous as machinery.

As I went down the mountain, I decided my imagination had been playing tricks, but in the last eight years I have seen variations of the same phenomenon so often in Africa and Arabia that I am convinced it is a genuine separation of mind and body. I have tried to discover why the former should appear as an exact duplicate of the latter.

An Alim of Telehdi in Morocco once explained it to me in this way. "You see what you expect, no more, no less. Sometimes *we* see nothing at all, because the shell which clothes the wisdom we have summoned is unimportant to us. To you it is essential, so, when you are in touch with a mind from far away, you clothe it in the fashion to which you are accustomed. So do our own disciples, and often each one of them sees the visitant in different garb, but, to us who have achieved some small knowledge, the contact is of the mind only, and our senses, which are the servants of the mind, do not operate at all."

Of course, all this to the West is as incomprehensible as aeroplanes and elevators, radio and electricity would be to primitive Arabia. Therefore, let us consider the science which makes possible such apparent impossibilities. In Moslem countries it is called "Ilm

el Issm," the "Study of the Name," and it is based on the principles, or magic virtues, contained in the names of God and in certain other names recorded in history, such as those of Solomon and the Seven Sleepers, who were Christian martyrs and yet form part of the hierarchy of Arab magianism.

This science has been studied throughout history, and, with the Moorish conquest of Spain, it became the chief branch of learning at the famous universities of Cordoba and Seville. When the Abencerage dynasty was driven out of Spain; when the last Moorish king, Boabdil, turned to look back at Granada and his mother rebuked him, "Weep not like a woman for that which thou canst not hold like a man," it is supposed that many books from the great Arab libraries were taken by the fugitives to Morocco and are preserved at the Zawia of Telehdi in the Ahmas Mountains. If this is true, it explains the popular study of "Ilm el Issm" among the Moroccan ulema. Mulai Sadiq er Raisuni showed me many interesting works on the subject when I was in Tazrut as a guest in the camp of his famous cousin, the brigand and patriot Raisuli. The science originated from the passage in the Koran, "God has great names—invoke him by those names and fly from those who misuse them," i.e. from those who attribute wrong names to God, or who try to make a wrong use of them, like the so-called "Sayed" Ahmed in Cairo.

The Prophet Mohammed, in one of the *Hadith* (Sayings) said, "God has 99 names—100 minus 1: those who know them will enter into paradise." It is supposed that, by using "the great name," the hundredth, all prayers are granted.

It is "the great name," only known to a few of the very learned and very holy, which makes God (or more probably the correct translation would be

“good”) the servant of the name, and it is written on a few unique amulets and talismans, but concealed in undecipherable cryptograms.

The curious thing is that the Prophet Mohammed, who, remember, never claimed to perform miracles, is not supposed to have known this great name, but some legends insist that his child wife, Ayesha, discovered it by chance, but was forbidden by the Prophet to use or reveal it.

This science of the virtues of God's names and their use on particular dates, under peculiar elemental and stellar conditions, is a considerable part of Moslem magic, but it is the study of a lifetime and successful practice depends on the most rigorous asceticism.

Each name has a separate virtue, known only to the initiated, and no strict Moslem will ever throw away written paper for fear a Name of God may be inscribed on it.

Bismillah, the first word of the Koran, is supposed to have been written on the side of Adam, the wing of Gabriel, the tongue of Jesus, and the seal of Solomon, and it is a curious fact that all genuine Moslem snake-charmers use the name of the Jewish Solomon in the ritualistic incantation which, handed down from father to son, undoubtedly stupefies reptiles.

Mulai Sadiq assured me that, by the use of these names, he could “raise jinns.” It had taken him seventeen years to acquire this proficiency, which was but the first step (since a jinn is only an elemental combination, with no real existence) to that annihilation of distance which allows the master sages to intercommunicate without personal contact. Here is the old man's own story of an unsuccessful attempt, reminiscent of the grotesque horrors I witnessed in Cairo. “I had been warned,” he said, “that the jinn should



appear in human form, with jellaba and turban, and, seating himself beside me, should talk to me in an ordinary voice and answer such questions as I put to him. But if he came in any other form, it was bad, and I must have no dealings with him. I made all the necessary exhortations and, at the end, I saw a shape in front of me. It had two legs like a dog, with human feet, and its body was also a dog's, but its neck was so long that it reached to the ceiling. I was in my house at Tetuan, and it seemed that the roof had become a funnel, so that the head of the beast was in the sky."

Mulai Sadiq spoke as if he were relating a most normal experience, and, when I asked somewhat breathlessly, what he had done in view of the unexpected appearance of the jinn, he answered impatiently, "Well, of course, I knew I had made a mistake, so I began praying as hard as I could and, at each repetition of the name of Allah, the beast grew smaller and smaller, till finally it vanished altogether."

"Have you ever tried again?"

"No, I have been much too frightened; but it is all a matter of learning. There is nothing that a man cannot do if he have enough will power."

It was through my subsequent friendship with one of the ulema of Telehdi that I saw this rite performed by an expert. We were sitting one afternoon in a mud-walled court in front of a qubba—the tomb of a holy man. The sun was just beginning to slant down towards the ranges, which looked like a crumpled cloak below us. We had been talking of magianism and I had enumerated the books I had read and the experiments I had witnessed. The sage, whose age seemed beyond any possible accumulation of years, told me earnestly and with obvious sincerity, "This is no study for the West."

"Why?" I asked.

"You are not sufficiently single-hearted. Just as the world for the pure is unlimited good, so, for those blinded by the flesh, it can be a well of evil." He smiled at me, half-prophet, half-child. "It is foolish to fish when you do not know what bait to use, or what will be the nature of your catch."

I asked him if there were any spells known to the greatest Moslem scientists which could raise the dead? He shook his head. "No," he replied, "but, if I wished to instruct a pupil in the wisdom of Al Farid," (mentioning a 12th century mystic and poet) "I might produce for him a figure of this sufi, in order that his immaturity should better grasp the knowledge which would be administered to him."

I am translating this conversation as accurately as I can remember it from the Arabic, as an explanation for the thing I saw. The alim refused to experiment with that which concerned past centuries. "Such knowledge is not for the unbelieving," he said, but he courteously refrained from using the word *kafr*, infidel.

I had been in Yemen, in Western Arabia, and it happened that Telehdi was in contact with an Idrissi college there—the founder of this sect was educated at the Kairouin University in Fez—so my friendly alim, generically named Sherif Mohammed, agreed to summon one of his Western Arabian compeers.

Remember, there was no shadow round us. We were in a bare, empty yard, in August sunshine. My companion drew a pentagram in the dust, marked some hieroglyphics in it and appeared to withdraw himself in contemplation. He took no notice of me as I huddled so close that I could touch his robes. All at once, there was a man sitting within the diagram. To say he "appeared suddenly" would not

express the effect, for it seemed as if he had always been there though I had only just noticed him. There was nothing startling or frightening. He was rather pale and rather hot. I could see the sweat on his forehead, under the veil worn by Yemen sherifs. He took off his sandals, with the enormous woven and dyed grass straps familiar to Arabia, but unknown in Morocco. His costume consisted of the Yemen striped cloth, and his face was the hairless, hollow-cheeked type of the original Arab stock. For some time, the Sherif Mohammed and his visitor talked in normal voices, but, while I could understand the former, the new-comer's words were incomprehensible to me. In fact, I cannot really be certain that I heard him talk. I received a normal impression of conversation, of the visitor fidgeting in the sunshine, of his emitting those long-drawn grunts, which are the Yemenese version of a sigh, and then I saw him wriggling his big toes back into his sandals. I noticed they were splayed and marked by the broad bands. After that he was gone, but again I had no impression of disappearance. It was just as if a visitor had left. Sherif Mohammed said the "Fatha," which is the first *sura* of the Koran and a Moslem prayer, and that was the end of the matter.

I have seen variations of that same performance in a Senussi College in Cyrenaica, in an Idrissi one in Asir, in the house of a Moqu'addam in Fez, and in Cairo, when three sheikhs of the Azhar University were discussing the powers of an Egyptian sufi, Sidi Abd er Rahman es Siuti.

It is quite easy, of course, to say that in each case I was hypnotized. It would have been child's play for any of these occultists to make me see anything they chose, but it would be an unprecedented insult to the name of Allah they invoked, and as illogical as

if the Archbishop of Canterbury should try to mystify a confirmation candidate with the three-card trick, or a crusading Pope, the keys of heaven in his hands, attempt to delude the mediæval faithful by producing rabbits out of his triple crown.

The character of these religious sheikhs must be taken into account when considering the scope of their powers. Their whole lives have been devoted to study. By the rigorous elimination of every physical appetite they have acquired a simplicity and serenity which enables them to "walk with God." Allah-the-All-Merciful-and-All-Compassionate is a part of their daily lives, present in every thought and every action.

They do not generally discuss their beliefs with strangers and their austerity is a barrier even to the bravest inquirer, but I have studied Moslem law and religion for years, and can talk the A B C of their language with whole-hearted sympathy to make up for any ignorance. Also, I have devoted much time and many journeys to working for the Arabs. Therefore, a number of their wise men have received me, pitying my sex, but willing, temporarily, to ignore it.

Experience has convinced me that, though ignorant dabblers in black magic, proficient in hypnotism, attempt to raise the dead and succeed in producing phantasms of the evil which is just as much at our service as the good which Moslem sages seek to acquire, the East can no more establish contact with individual dead than we can. The science of magianism can, I believe, co-ordinate all its own existing wisdom by means of contacts to us inexplicable, since, though purely mental, they have a physical appearance. It can so separate mind and body that the former has an existence of its own and the latter can, if necessary, be independent of any material need such as food, air, or water, or indifferent to any physical



pain—as in the case of Indian fakirs buried for months in a state of trance, or a yogi at Lucknow, who continued instructing his pupils in abstruse philosophy while a European surgeon was cutting a deep-seated abscess out of his back.

The aim of all Eastern magianism, as practised in legitimate colleges, monasteries and hermitages, is to add to the world's store of knowledge, believing that true wisdom is synonymous with good, and that this alone, impersonal and indestructible, survives for the benefit of the future.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHEN I WAS MOST AFRAID

**I**N my sort of life most things happen so quickly that one has not time to be afraid.

Long ago I was frightened in a five-day storm on a perfectly good liner off the north coast of Australia, when the starboard portholes blew in and the cabin floor turned into a wall.

I was more frightened at midnight in an old Forbes castle in Scotland when, according to my dog, fangs bared, hackles erect, the family ghost was active. I was most frightened on an occasion in Western Arabia.

Now, to understand this story, you must let your imagination rip! Forget steam and electricity, policemen, signboards, and the superiority of the white race. None of these exist in Arabia at present. Moreover, an aeroplane or a lift in the country I am telling you about would be as extraordinary as battle, murder and the sudden death of traitors are ordinary and commonplace.

When I was lecturing in America I used to tell sophisticated Middle-Western audiences how an Arab host would insist on presenting the principal guest at his feast with the glazed and often semi-raw eye of the sheep which, roasted whole, formed the chief dish. I explained that it tasted like an oyster, and, in spite of the various unpleasant appendages which invariably stuck to its inner side, it was just possible, by shutting one's eyes and invoking all one's strength of will, to swallow the nauseous thing at a gulp.

I suppose this has happened to every Middle-Eastern official and to most of the distinguished tourists who study local colour from Morocco to Trans-Jordan, but no American audience could "swallow" that sheep's eye story.

A delightful Westerner commented: "Sure, ma'am, I couldn't help thinking of that there eye way down inside you, seeing all the private things it shouldn't see!" Another, determined to show that his leg simply could not be pulled by any young woman in a scarlet frock, with an "English accent," remarked: "That's a whale of a story. D'you get away with it often?"

Now for the coincidence, which, by the way, is the point of these anecdotes. When I was in Abyssinia with my camera-man, Mr. Jones, taking the "Red Sea to Blue Nile" film, we were climbing wearily up one of the endless goat-tracks which zig-zagged across the face of a cliff. Looking up at the smooth rock above us, I remarked, hot and cross, to the guide: "If we were in my country, we should get into a cage at the bottom of this mountain, press a button and shoot up to the top in two or three minutes." The unbelieving native, who had never heard of elevator or crane, gazed at me with admiration. "That is a lion of a story," he said. "But do you expect men to believe it?"

After which prelude, here is the tale of when, without reason, I was afraid.

The thing began at the tenth stage of a march from the west coast of Arabia to a hill village where a friendly sheikh awaited us. I had forced the pace because of the hostility of the tribes through whose country we marched, and from the first day the guide had protested to deaf ears.

That guide was an unprepossessing person, by name

Farraj, a mountaineer with muscles which corded over hairy chest and thighs. His features were broad and flat, and his great shock of fuzzy hair was held above a low brow with a fillet of thyme. His garments consisted of a narrow loin-cloth and a row of amulets.

Savage in mind as well as appearance, he showed his resentment of a woman's authority. The climax came at sunset when Farraj called a halt. The place was unsuitable for camping, for there was no grazing and no protection against attack, so, disregarding the man's sullen fury, I countermanded his orders. For a second the line of camels wavered. Then the leading driver slipped from his post.

"It is better to rest, lady," he smiled up at me as I swayed above the hump of a tall hejeen (camel). "The hill you wish to reach is strange country, very far away." The other Bedouins ranged themselves on the side of the mountaineer, and I swung my beast round to face them.

"The man who refuses to march with me goes a long journey," I said, and drew my revolver.

There was a murmur of indignation, and Farraj put up his rifle. He was a good target against the sunset. My first shot grazed his hand; my second sent his Martini flying.

"There is no doubt about that journey," I said, and laughed at him.

"By Allah, your words are as straight as your bullets," muttered the head driver. Reluctantly he caught the tail of his camel, and climbed up deftly by hock and quarter. A minute later the caravan was marching east towards the distant line of hills. Farraj would have sulked in the rear, but I had no wish to have a bullet in my back, so I ordered him forward and he went with eyes averted, licking a hand stained red.



For an hour we marched silently. Then one of the camel-men started singing: "She is young, very young! Like doves are her feet, silver and sweet. She has a man's heart and her hand is swift to shoot." The improvisation continued and one by one the Bedouins swelled the chorus till the camels quickened their pace and the first stars swung up like flowers in a bed of indigo.

That night I was restless. The moonlight streamed through the open flap of my tent like molten silver. A grove of palms, stripped for thatch, looked like skeletons against a desert already grey with spring herbs. Impatiently I flung myself over, and the narrow bed knocked against the flap, which fell, shutting out the moonlight, except for one bright pencil that wrote a silver line across the floor.

After that I must have slept, for the position of the line had changed; then something swept away my drowsiness. Alert, but motionless, I listened to a soft, scraping sound.

In the dim light I saw a hand wrestling with one of the pegs. Another second and a man's shoulders had followed with a faint, hissing scrape reminiscent of some crawling animal. Cold drops broke out on my forehead, but I did not move. With infinite caution my fingers crept up towards the revolver hidden under my pillow. The fleabag cramped the action of my elbow, and I thought I should be too late.

The intruder was crouching now, as he drew one foot after him. For a moment the light glinted on that foot, and I saw the huge turquoise toe-ring which Farraj wore. It was an amulet and his greatest treasure. "While I live it shall never leave me," he had boasted to the caravan.

My fingers closed round the revolver. The savage loomed up like some fantastic monster, hirsute and

gigantic. Without conscious volition I fired through the sleeping-bag. The report shattered the tension, and Farraj swayed towards me. The knife he held almost touched my coverings, but the second shot spun him round. Stumbling towards the flap, he tore it open and disappeared into the night.

Running feet thudded through the sand. A voice shouted, "Allah save you, Sayeda—what has happened?" A confusion of talk followed. "Has a jinn attacked you? Bismillah, this is an evil place for spirits!"

"It is nothing," I called, and went out to show them that no jinn had flown away with me. I was not frightened, but I was so angry that I felt as if I should choke.

A week later, arrived at our destination, I sat in the sheikh's hut awaiting my host. It was night, and a wind stirred the fire of palm fronds. From the hillside came the echo of the tribesmen's prayer. Passionate and insistent, it swelled into the battle-cry of warrior Islam: "There is no God but God, and God is Great!"

I shivered a little as I thought of the myriad swords which, throughout history, had sprung from their scabbards to greet that cry.

It was very dark in the hut, and I could only just make out the shape of the rope couches which were ranged round the walls. A woman in a blue wrap leaned motionless beside the doorway. All danger was past. Yet I was terribly afraid. Reaction perhaps, nerve strain—who can explain the sudden mastery of panic? It brooks no argument; it knows no reason. When it gets a good grip on you it is a nightmare, riding you where it will. Vainly I tried deep breathing, and equally vainly, I thought of Piccadilly, where the sky-signs blaze across theatre-land.

The prayer died suddenly on the hillside, and the woman turned her head as if she were listening. My throat was dry. Motionless I waited, not knowing for what. It came at last, a sharp animal cry which made the flamelight sinister and the night wild with terror. I sprang to my feet, stumbling over my native draperies.

"It is nothing," said the woman quietly. "Rest yourself. My master comes." We stared at each other in the dimness, and with a shock, I realized at once my helplessness and my insignificance. Islam has little count of women.

How long I crouched there I do not know. Slaves replenished the fire. There was a murmur of voices, the tinkle of metal vessels. At last a tall presence blocked the doorway, and a voice hailed me gravely.

"Your coming is blessed. May Allah give you peace." Light flared up in the room and with down-cast eyes, I returned the sheikh's greetings. He was a man of middle age, strong-featured and grey-bearded, wrapped in the camel's-hair cloak of a Bedouin, the only sign of his great rank the gold-hilted dagger in his girdle.

"My house is yours," he said. "I have heard of the difficulties of your journey. Rest now in safety."

I told him of Farraj's attack, of how he had disappeared, apparently only slightly wounded, of how loyally the other Bedouins had looked after me, and how we had wandered eastward for two days till we picked up a nomad tribesman who had volunteered to guide us. "Otherwise who knows what would have happened to us?" I ended. "Your deserts are wide and your people warriors!"

The sheikh had listened in silence. "All this I knew," he said. "With us vengeance may be delayed, but when it comes, it is very sure."

A row of slaves brought platters piled high with

mutton and rice. My host took a piece of flesh with his fingers. "We have eaten together," he said. "Your life is on my head, and I will send you in safety on your way."

I watched his stately figure pass out of the circle of firelight. Then, with a good appetite, I set to work on the savoury dishes before me.

I had just finished and was staring regretfully at my greasy fingers, and the dishevelled appearance of the feast, when an old woman came in. "With health, with appetite," she greeted me, and sat down on the clay floor beside me. "The sheikh, my master, sends you a gift," she said, "that you may have faith in his protection." I saw she carried something wrapped in scarlet silk.

"I am grateful and thankful——" I began, and then I noticed the strained expectation in her eyes. My fingers trembled on the silk. Very slowly I unwrapped the thing I held. The old woman did not move.

"I can't," I said thickly. "You know I can't—what is it?" My lips were stiff, and only by a mighty effort could I restrain the panic which lapped like waves around my feet.

"The camel men say 'The strange lady has the courage of a spirit,'" suggested the crone softly.

With a shudder I tore off the last piece of silk, and a huge turquoise toe-ring rolled on the floor. It was wet with blood. I stared at the old woman. "Farraj? What has happened to him?" I muttered, while the far-off ghost of a shriek seemed to echo in my brain.

"The life of a guest is on the head of my lord," said the crone. "His vengeance is very sure. Rest now in safety."

But I continued to stare, sick with unreasoned and utterly causeless terror.



## CHAPTER VIII

### COURAGE

THE accepted ideas of courage and fear seem to me equally illogical, because hardly anyone is afraid at the exact moment when they should be and the bravest people are generally those of whom one hears least. They are not the men and women who have never known fear, but those who know it so well that it needs all their will power to conquer it.

Some years ago I was in New Guinea with another girl. We were driving a buckboard up to the foot of the mountains, where pack-ponies awaited us. We stopped to lunch at a hemp plantation, and the owner told the driver of our cart to go round by a ford and meet us at the other side of the river.

"You can save two hours' trek by crossing a rope bridge we've got—you don't mind alligators, do you? The water's stiff with them, so watch your step!"

We laughed, and in due course, fortified, as far as I remember, with sucking-pig and bustard, we started for the river. The so-called bridge was a yard-wide strip of netting, slung fifty feet above the water. There was a rope to hang on to as well, but time and weather had played tricks with both, so that, mid-way, the passenger was fully extended, his feet on the sagging mesh, through whose great holes he could see the oily grey water, and his hands stretched to their utmost limit to keep hold of the rope above his head. If he lost his balance, or stepped a little to right or left, the bridge swung out like a hammock, and he ran the

risk of being left suspended from his hands over the greenish-brown things below that looked like logs until they opened their mouths. Two or three of the plantation assistants ran across, with as much footwork as possible, to show how safe it was.

"Well, I'll have to say good-bye," said our host. "I've absolutely no head. Couldn't cross that thing for a million. It's as safe as houses, of course, but I can't even look down from a roof. Rotten, isn't it?"

We commiserated with him and started over the "bridge of repentance," as they called it. By dint of glueing my eyes to the opposite trees, I got across with no more than a jellyfish feeling in my middle, but my companion, Aline, stuck half-way. She was not very tall and she could hardly reach the rope above her.

"I can't do it," she said, and screamed. Two assistants precipitated themselves to her rescue, but the triple weight sagged the bridge still further, so that nobody had much purchase on the overhead strand. There were a few agonized moments while the girl was incapable of moving.

"Put your hands on my shoulders. Shut your eyes," ordered the man in front, but Aline did not obey.

"It's no good," she said, thickly. "I can't move." Shudder after shudder shook her, her feet began to slip and, for a second, it looked as if all three must fall.

A voice from the bank steadied them.

"Go back to the side. Leave her alone. Lie down, miss, flat. Shut your eyes."

Aline dropped on to the netting, where, of course, she had good purchase.

"It's all right," said the voice, which I did not recognize. "I'm coming."

To our amazement, the plantation-owner swung, sure-footed, across the bridge.

"It's all up. He'll never do it," gasped a would-be rescuer at my elbow. But he did! Without hesitation, he bent over the girl, dropped the overhead rope long enough to pick her up—a miracle of balance—caught it again, and came grimly on. There was no faltering till half-a-dozen hands seized him at the bank. Then he almost swayed out of their grasp. He was dragged by main force into safety. "Magnificent!" I began. "You saved——" but the unheeding hero staggered to a tree and was violently sick.

After we'd all recovered our everyday selves, an assistant suggested to his chief: "Well, we might as well be going back, sir. You'll be able to do it on your head now."

The older man turned literally green. "I'll never set foot on the damned thing again as long as I live!" he grunted. "I'm going round. Send a horse to the ford."

If any normal person has been faced by such a situation and has conquered it, he generally thinks to himself, "I scarcely knew what I was doing. I was a bit above myself then," but he was not. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, he was just himself, no more, no less. Everyone has this other self, hidden deep down, but it needs a crisis to make it come to the surface.

I have a little friend, slender, red-haired, with adorable freckles just gilding her curled-up features. She is frightened of most things. Cockroaches nearly drive her mad. Her husband insisted on taken her shooting in East Africa. She did not enjoy it, for she was cursed with the kind of imagination that pictures an unknown danger behind every bush.

One evening a buffalo was wounded. Foolishly, in spite of the advice of their native hunters, they

followed him into the bush. The tracks began to twist in a manner to warn the experienced. "We've lost him," said the chief hunter. "He's quite likely to be hunting us. We'd better get out."

"I'm going to try that grass first," retorted the Englishman. "You'd better get up a tree," he instructed his wife.

The natives protested, but their employer tramped into the grass and disappeared. For a time they kept track of him by the waving stalks. Then even this trace disappeared. Silence came with the sunset. A ghost of a sound broke it—it might have been a distant cry. The little red-haired girl, who was frightened of anything sudden, remarked that she was going into the grass to look for her husband. The natives laughed. "The old bull is in there somewhere and it'll be dark soon," they said.

My friend took no notice, but marched into the grass. Her followers hesitated at the edge, called to her, argued for a few minutes, then ran away. It must have been twilight between those great stalks, but the girl blundered through them, her heart thudding so noisily that she heard none of the evening rustlings, the little creeping things and small animals slipping out to water. She found her husband. He had stepped in a hole, pitched forward on to his head and a stone, and was, momentarily, stunned. His wife pillowed his head on her knee, and doubtless tried the usual inefficient first aid. There was no result, so she picked up the rifle and sat hugging it, in the middle of a nightmare darkness punctuated by sounds imaginary and real, and by twin points of light that were the eyes of unseen animals. In due course the man recovered consciousness, the moon rose, and they stumbled out, but not before the red hair was faintly streaked with grey.



Men are generally supposed to have more courage than women, perhaps because they have more spectacular opportunities of showing it. Reporters invariably ask the feminine traveller, "How can you—a woman—do these journeys?" and there is a blend of surprise and disapproval in their masculine voices. I always answer—"It's because I'm a woman that I can do them." Women ought to make good explorers, because they haven't enough dull common sense to know when they're beaten. Their imagination will always show them just one possible or impossible way out.

But the finest courage they contribute to life is connected with their wifedom and motherhood. A thousand sacrifices are made daily on these altars. They are most spectacular where life is hardest.

In the polar North, where the problem of existence is narrowed to food and shelter, an Eskimo mother has often cut off her finger to provide nourishment for her child.

In an igloo, a hut built of frozen snow, a wife, lying beside her husband, under rugs made of seal and bear fur, was awakened by something falling on her face. It was not the season for a thaw, so she was amazed to touch crumbling snow. A moment later the roof split open just above her husband and the head of a polar bear appeared. The harpoons were, as usual, outside. The man was weaponless and the beast maddened by hunger. While the Eskimo hesitated, his wife seized a stick, dipped the end into the seal oil which spluttered in the lamp, and waved the impromptu torch in the beast's face. With this she kept him at bay until her husband could burrow through the door and reach his harpoons.

Another Eskimo woman, who had been widowed by a bear, lived on a frozen river with her only son,

a boy of twelve. They existed by means of the scant fish they could catch, but that particular winter the ice was solid and they had to depend on the boy's bow and arrows. One day, wandering along the banks with their dogs, they came upon a polar bear who was nearly as hungry as they were. The dogs brought the monster to bay. The boy loosed an arrow, but, though his aim was true, his strength was not sufficient to kill the bear. Again and again he used his bow. The animal was getting tired, but, with claws and fangs, it could still keep the dogs at a distance.

"One more arrow!" encouraged the mother.

"I haven't got one," returned the boy, and showed an empty quiver. The Eskimo woman heard the catch in his voice. They wanted food badly. If they were forced to kill the dogs, their hunting would be at an end. Lips grim, she waited her chance. While the bear was occupied with a dog, she dashed at him, dragged an arrow from his flank, and returned to her son with the new weapon. The famous polar explorer (Mr. Flaherty), who told me this story, insisted that triumph lent strength to the youth's last shot, and the bear provided a month's plentiful food.

The bravest thing I ever saw done was not at all spectacular. It was in the Australian bush, where a little mouse of a woman, with nondescript colouring and a nondescript mind, ran a somewhat untidy station<sup>1</sup> with an overworked and under-nourished husband. They never had time to do anything, because shearing, or branding, or lambing claimed all their attention. They hadn't time to eat, or sleep, or wash enough. Their whole world, their whole outlook on life, was summarized in the one word "sheep." Then one day, the only child, aged six, got diphtheria. The nearest doctor was three hundred and eleven miles away, over

<sup>1</sup> Station in Australia means farm.

rough downland and through blue gum woods. As usual, the parents hesitated.

At last, when it was almost certainly useless, the man started off in a Ford to get the doctor. It would take thirty-six hours at least, probably more. The child got rapidly worse. It could hardly breathe. The mother fluttered round, pitifully indecisive. I spoke of tracheotomy. "If the doctor comes in time," I added.

The woman stiffened. "Do you know the place?" she asked in a voice that was suddenly firm.

"No," I returned hastily.

She ran a finger down the child's throat, which was contorted in the effort to breathe. "I must try it," she said. "It's the only chance."

With the utmost precision she sterilized a penknife and a hair-pin. "You must hold him," she directed.

I did, but with my eyes shut.

Unflinching, she opened a passage, washed it, and held it open with the hair-pin. I was frankly terrified, imagining (aged twenty) that the boy would die and I should be an accessory to murder.

On the contrary, the child's breathing grew easier. When the doctor arrived, the first thing he did was to congratulate the mother. "But of course, you've seen the operation done? You must have been in a hospital."

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "I read of it, that's all."

Within the next few minutes she'd upset half-a-dozen things, blundered into a table, behaved so clumsily, displayed such trembling hands that I couldn't recognize her as the sure-fingered surgeon of a few hours before.

Most of woman's heroism is a matter of love. Man's is inspired by patriotism or mere habit, by lack of imagination, a good digestion, and perhaps, above

all, by sport. What sacrifices has masculine vanity not laid at the clay feet of his idols—big-game hunting, steeple-chasing, flying. I have seen many a cross-country rider, and not a few pilots, white-lipped at the start.

In Tripolitana the Italian Government provided me with a small S.F.A. machine, in order that I might fly over some ruins of which I was writing. When I arrived at the aerodrome the usual pilot was away. The superintendent casually ordered a wan youth to take me up. We wobbled horribly in our flight, though there was no wind. I inquired the reason, apologizing for my anxiety by saying: "You see, I've never been up in this kind of machine before."

"Neither have I," retorted the pilot, gloomily.

"Why on earth didn't you say so in the aerodrome?" I gasped.

"The fellows would have thought I was afraid," he returned, half-sulkily.

"Well, I *am* afraid," I said, firmly. "You can tell them all so and we'll land at once." We did, with a shock which upset the S.F.A. more than us.

Not only is it not in the least brave to do a dangerous thing of which you're not frightened, but surely it is not brave to do it even if you are frightened, unless it serves some useful purpose.

The young man who, unable to swim, threw himself into the Seine a winter or so ago, to rescue a workman who had missed his footing on a barge, was merely foolish. The workman, who happened to be a very good swimmer, had great difficulty in saving his would-be rescuer.

Courage, above all things, means keeping your head. To prove its possession, it is not necessary to run purposely into danger. It is only necessary to remain calm when you are there.



A friend of mine was lion-shooting with her husband in Rhodesia. She got tired half-way, and decided to rest under a tree with a packet of sandwiches till the others returned. As an after-thought her husband tossed his revolver into her lap. "You might as well have it just in case——" he remarked.

"Lions don't attack human beings," retorted Eve.

But, unfortunately, this particular lioness did. Whether she was hungry, or her cub had been killed, or what reason she had for breaking all the rules of the game, I don't know. She appeared suddenly from nowhere and crouched, with attack written in every line of her, from flattened shoulders to twitching tail. There were two bullets left in the revolver, and a Colt is not a suitable weapon against lions. It will kill at a few feet range, that is all.

Eve knew she had nothing to waste and she was no shot. She waited while the lioness stalked her, she waited till the beast sprang, and then she fired her two shots into its mouth. It died within a foot of her.

It must have taken some nerve to wait. Most people would have missed or merely wounded, by firing at a range which they knew to be futile.

In Morocco I heard of a girl who set out to avenge her whole family against the conqueror to whom her father had been obliged to promise her in marriage. In those days the Sherif Raisuli, brigand, warrior, and Sultan of the Moroccan mountains, was in the habit of decorating the fences of his enemies with the decapitated heads of their sons. The bride, who was to seal the treaty of peace, had watched her brothers suffer in this manner. There was no man left in the household, except the aged father, too infirm to offer further resistance. The wedding-day came. The bride was sent to Raisuli's house, but she refused to touch his gifts. She would not eat or drink. She would not wear the

wedding finery. All afternoon, while the women made merry in the next room, she sat in a corner, silent. The feasting and the music lasted till the hour of the evening prayers, but still the bride crouched in her corner, one hand hidden in her bosom. At last Raisuli came in to her, while two slaves stood in the doorway, holding platters of dates and milk, symbols of fertility and chastity.

"Allah give you peace," said the bridegroom.

"There can be no peace between you and me," retorted the bride. "See—I would not touch your gifts; but, since there is no man left to avenge our house, I bring you a gift." She drew a knife from her bosom and struck at the huge figure in front of her. The blade glanced off the jewelled belt-buckle and fell out of her hand.

For a moment there was silence. The knife lay on the floor between them. The slaves were dumb with terror. What awful fate would happen to the woman brave enough, mad enough, to strike the Sherif? The ordinary penalty for a wife who attacks an ordinary husband is slow strangulation, but, as a descendant of the Prophet, their lord was holy, and his life beyond earthly price.

Slowly Raisuli stooped and picked up the knife. "Strike again," he suggested, offering it to the girl. "Your aim was bad, but you cannot hurt me, for I bear a charmed life."

Shivering, the bride took the dagger. With a sudden movement, she drove it into her own heart. The slave, who told me the story, ended it with these words: "The poor one fell at my master's feet and she cursed him before she died. He looked at her for a long while, but he said nothing."

Years ago I was camping in the Rockies with the same Aline who lost her head on the Papuan rope

bridge. We were too broke to have a proper outfit, so we just tramped over the passes with one pack-pony. Doubtless we got off the usual trails, but we had food, blankets and a kettle, so we did not care. One night we slept in a ramshackle hut, tethering our pony by the stream. I remember a porcupine yowled outside, and the pine branches, which we thought would make a nice bed, were prickly—altogether rather a disturbed night. At dawn our pony began squealing. We looked out to see what was the matter. A very large bear was approaching the helpless animal, which could not break its halter. Now, I do not know anything about the habits of bears. They may be vegetarians, but that one looked remarkably purposeful. It was obvious that something had to be done. But we had no more formidable weapon than the kettle. Also it is very difficult to be brave when one is cold, hungry, and not at all angry! I was just wondering whether the pony would satisfy the bear or whether it would need us for dessert, when Aline rushed out of the hut, brandishing my pyjama coat like a club. The bear stopped to look at her. My companion dashed straight at him and flicked the stripes under his nose. The suddenness of it surprised him, or perhaps he did not like the colour. In any case, he departed with dignity and a suspicion of haste.

“Weren’t you frightened?” I asked.

“Not much. Bridges and birds are my pet terrors,” she replied.

I suppose we all of us have our own particular fears, but, thank Heaven, they are generally such unexpected ones that the rest of the world never guesses them.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHICH IS THE BRAVER?

**W**ELL, which is the braver, man or woman? On the whole a woman's courage is instinctive or impulsive. A man's is reasoned and objective. A woman is perhaps more hopeful than logical. She may see "ways out" where none exist, but she is never weighed down by consequences.

To some women any risk is a stimulant; to most men it is a responsibility. Therefore, if I were going into danger, I would rather have a woman with me. When I was well in the middle of it, I would rather have a man.

Woman is at heart an adventurer, even though her experiments be limited to the shape of her hat, the colour of the walls, or the form in which yesterday's joint shall appear at to-day's lunch.

It has been suggested that physical courage belongs to man and moral courage to woman, but which category includes endurance of pain?

I think women bear not only pain but discomfort better than men, and I agree with a certain traveller who, when asked if her husband accompanied her to the wilderness, replied: "Oh, no! It's not the sort of country you can take a man to!"

Man is more fastidious than woman and he prefers his deserts punctuated with washing. I took a delightful cinema operator through Abyssinia and he learned only two words of the language—"hot water"—which he used to repeat hopefully and vainly each arid morning and each dust-choked night.



A woman will endure an eternity of makeshift and discomfort with patience and courage. She is often much less capable of visualizing danger than man, so she will disregard it in making her plans.

My first travels round the world in tramp steamers, banana or copra boats, river junks and rafts, or astride anything four-legged, from an elephant to a water buffalo, were made with a woman, whose invariable answer, when officials flung up their hands insisting, "It's impossible to go there," was "Really! Well, when shall we start?"

During an unauthorized attempt to cross China between two opposing armies, we were captured by the Southern forces. Our rice junk was stopped on the Sian River by a strategic barrier of boats, our guide was beheaded as a spy and, after a futile attempt to escape by land in the dark, we were treated as prisoners.

One night, soldiers came to fetch my companion. She was carried across the river into the town and ordered, with a couple of bayonets a foot from her back, to cure a man whose wound was in the last stages of gangrene.

My companion extracted an obvious bullet and so impressed the onlookers that, thereafter, we were obliged to do first-aid work with soap, face-cream, scissors and such bandages as the cobalt blouses of the soldiers would provide.

Ten years ago I was staying on a cattle station in northern Australia. Land there is measured in square miles. There are no fences. The boundary riders go out on a three-month circuit and they meet no one on their trek.

It was the branding season, and every man was at work on the young heifers and bullocks in the crushes—or corrals, as they are called in America—a half-day's journey from the house.

There was a Chinese cook on the premises and a couple of nondescripts who did odd jobs; but on the morning I'm talking about these men had been sent on errands. One was to intercept the monthly post rider at a point twenty-three miles away; the other was to inspect an artesian well that was rumoured to be running dry.

"Do you mind being left alone?" asked my host, a hand on the wife's shoulder. "There's three months' pay in the house."

Sylvia—she was only twenty-three, fair-skinned, fair-haired, but with the wise, grave eyes all these dwellers in the wilderness possess—shook herself free.

"I've got a revolver somewhere, I believe. Don't you worry."

"I'd back you against any man," laughed her husband; "but, if Cockatoo Pete pays you a visit, give him all he wants and let him go!"

It was a staple joke and we duly smiled, for Pete was a well-known character, a boggy-man used to frighten children who strayed too far among the blue gum trees.

Sylvia and I talked about this somewhat mythical individual while we struggled with the week's wash in a tub under the trees.

"You're putting in too much blue," remarked my hostess—and then the incredible happened. Pete appeared from nowhere.

"I guess you're alone," he said. "I don't want to make no trouble for ladies. You have the key."

The girl nodded. She moved towards a drawer, opened it, took something out. In a second she had the thief covered.

"Put up your hands! I've learned to shoot."

With a grin, Pete obeyed. Obviously he considered the situation temporary.

"Go out and get the post," Sylvia told me without turning her head, and I remembered that the nondescripts would soon be returning. The man made no objection to my departure.

After what seemed a lifetime and was, I suppose, ten minutes, two riders came into view. I had just enough sense to make them dismount out of hearing and to order a stealthy approach while I choked out my story.

The situation was unchanged when we reached the porch. Pete and Sylvia were watching each other grimly. Our footsteps rang on the wood. Pete turned his head. Down came his hands.

"Shoot!" we yelled simultaneously.

Sylvia hesitated.

A revolver swung up in front of her. She ducked as a shot went over her head.

"Fire, you idiot!" I screamed.

Several revolvers went off. Nobody was seriously hurt. The nondescripts acted after the manner of their kind. Pete treated them as ninepins and was away before they had recovered.

A bullet in the post-bearer's leg disorganized pursuit. "Why in—why the——" exploded his justly incensed companion, "didn't you plug him full of it?"

Sylvia looked at the revolver. "It wasn't loaded," she said.

I knew another woman in India who dealt as effectively with a thief. She is now Lady B—— and the widow of a famous official. The Indian garrison town where her husband was stationed had been terrified by the exploits of a robber, who used his knife with the swiftness of lightning and the accuracy of a cash register. He was an Oriental Jack-the-Ripper and women were his special victims.

Mrs. B——, as she was then, returned to her bungalow at that particular hour when every servant is occupied with his evening meal, as much a rite as his religion. There was only the ayah, curled up fast asleep on a mat. Colonel B—— was at the club. The chairs had been removed from the veranda, but a roll of rugs, sent up for inspection by a new merchant in the bazaar, lay near the door.

Mrs. B—— glanced at them casually. Too heavy to unroll, she decided. Then something peculiar struck her. She looked again. The sole of a man's shoe was just visible at one end, well inside the bundle. She was alone in the bungalow with a timid mouse of a native.

Without hesitation the Englishwoman spoke:

"It's too lovely to go in. Bring me a book out here." The ayah complied.

"Why, the pages aren't cut!" remarked Mrs. B—— "Get me the Colonel Sahib's knife." The ayah brought the dagger.

"Don't bother about a chair," said her mistress, and plump!—settled herself on the roll of rugs.

The lady weighed two hundred pounds. She kept the dagger pointing towards the opening through which the thief might try to wriggle out. There she sat until an hour later when her husband rode up with a couple of orderlies.

On the whole native women are amazingly courageous. During our campaign in Mesopotamia in 1915, the fiercest attacks on the British line north of Baghdad were delivered by irregular Arab cavalry.

The 13th Hussars were ordered to break up a band famous for its daring. They made one of the few great charges of the war, and one of their officers told me that when the Arab dead were collected for burial many of them were women.



I have seen a native woman in my own caravan ride all day on a camel in intolerable heat, cook the drivers' dinner at the end of the march, deliver a child during the night with only a few little animal moans, and, looking like a shrivelled ghost of herself, be prepared to endure an eleven-hour march the following day.

Once, in Abyssinia, I was having a hasty breakfast, the coffee-pot balanced on one knee, a plate of pallid and doubtful eggs on the other, when the village headman approached.

"There is a woman who has hurt her hand. Will you look at it?"

"Oh, yes; send her along," I replied, automatically looking around for the medicine chest, my mouth full of stale rice.

The girl approached. Her left arm was hidden under the close-wound white chamma, the universal shawl-like garment of Abyssinia.

Suddenly she drew out her hand and thrust it in front of me. My heart leaped into my throat and then tumbled heavily into some place where it could be sick. I won't describe that hand. What had once been fingers were like ripe strawberries. The rest was worse, but its owner remained unmoved.

"How? How?" I gulped.

"An accident," was all the answer I got.

"It hurts most when the moon is full," said the headman, "but she does not complain."

In Japan, having no money but a lot of energy, I tramped from the south to the north of the main island with a girl as adventurous as myself. We had a little maid-guide-companion called Toku. She was foisted on us by a paternal ambassador, anxious that we should not get into more trouble than necessary, and she was accustomed only to conducting the rich and important

from one superlative hotel to another. She simply couldn't walk, so we hired her a pony.

Uncomplainingly she rode twenty-three miles the first day across a couple of mountain passes. Never before had she been on a horse, and, towards the end of the day, her face was green under the thick white-wash used by all Japanese. Her hair hung in damp wisps, and wrinkles were grooved from mouth to chin.

"Tired, Toku?" I asked anxiously, because we *had* to get to the next village.

"No, no; only a little stiff," she replied.

Sunset came. "We're nearly there," I said. "Good heavens! What's that?" A stream of blood was trickling down each of Toku's socks.

"Nothing," she reproved me; "the fastenings of the stirrup leathers have cut me a little."

They had. Each buckle had literally burrowed into Toku's plump legs. The flesh was furrowed like a ploughed field and raw as the inside of a water-melon. Horrified at the havoc to the soft, unmuscled limbs, I demanded, "Why did you not tell me?"

"I did my duty," replied Toku gravely.

What exactly is courage? I once saw a soldier run amuck on an Indian hill square. He had a repeating rifle with which he had already wounded two men. While a company hesitated, a subaltern, whose nickname was "The Rabbit," because he was frightened of everything—horses, mountain paths, and women—walked quietly across the hundred yards of open square and took away the rifle.

A woman, with whom I was travelling through war-rent China, sat all day reading Anatole France on the roof of a sampan under a curiously pallid Union Jack that we had made out of various under-garments, while insurgents fired at us and each other from both

banks of the river. (My own suggestion had been to pull up the deck-boards and find an ignominious refuge below water-level.) But she nearly died of fright when she stepped, barefooted, out of a Fiji hut on to a wet hen.

For years I have had a little Arab teacher called Teufik. His head is like a melon, tufted with baby's hair. His eyes are a watery blue. He is very small and slight and his limbs are an irregular collection of spokes, none of which seems to have any connexion with the others. When he stayed at my father's country house I offered to take him out shooting.

"I don't like to run into danger unnecessarily," he said, and cringed away from the guns. Another day I suggested a walk in the woods.

"Is it safe?" he asked.

"There's nothing there but foxes."

"Do they bite?" he asked.

Some time later we met in Aleppo. There was a riot. The crowd in the markets got out of hand and proceeded to lynch their natural enemy—a money-lender. I was caught in the throng and too occupied in saving myself to do much in the way of protest.

But one voice was raised in no uncertain measure. One figure threw itself in the way of the crowd; was crumpled up; miraculously disentangled itself from hundreds of feet; mounted a wall; reiterated its protest. Unheeded, it wormed into the heart of the mob, drunk with noise and passion; clung finally to a lamp-post which was to be the gallows; pleaded, exhorted, threatened, till stunned into silence by a stray blow.

It was Teufik. Such a pathetic, inadequate little figure he looked next day, with a monstrous bump on his head and a face almost lost in new and odd excrescences.

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Hanging is very painful," he said.

"Was the man any relation? Did you know him?"

"Oh, no; but I don't like people being hurt," he answered.

Courage has no common denominator, but I think, whether it be masculine or feminine, it is always really of the mind, not the body. What we call physical pluck is a question of nerves, digestion, lack of imagination, or sheer rage. I was so angry once in Abyssinia that I walked into a line of rifles with a half-empty revolver and a feeling that if I could not get through somehow I should burst.

There is another kind, made up of romance, of emotion, and a choky feeling in the throat, with which one of my African caravans awaited an attack in moonlight and the desert.

We were a day's march from Kufara, the sacred African town that we had been the first strangers to visit. The governor had allowed us to depart in safety; had even provided a guide for the six-hundred-mile crossing of a waterless desert.

"The bad men lie in wait beyond the last oasis. Be watchful," he said.

The very first night there were rumours of pursuit. We camped on a rise, with the sacks of date fodder piled up in front of us. Nobody was in the least afraid. The night was too glamorous, the moon a magic lantern, projecting our shadows flat and purple on a world of silver. We imagined a romantic fight—a handful against a host—in fact we were drunk with adventure.

Fortunately the attack did not materialize, so our pluck was never put to the test.

Real bravery deals with the intangible—such fears, apprehensions, and suffering as cannot be conquered by strength of wit and muscle. I repeat, it is not brave



to do a thing of which you are not afraid. I am sometimes told that I am "intrepid," or "fearless," or "the nerviest woman in the world," because I lead expeditions through more or less unknown countries.

It makes me feel particularly foolish, because it just happens that I'm not afraid of natives, deserts and fighting.

"I suppose you've never been frightened in your life?" demands some person without imagination. Of course I have. Often. But not of those particular things.

I am terrified of ghosts. Some relations own a place in Scotland, wherein Mary Queen of Scots spent a restless night and chronicled on the wall its terrors. That place is haunted. You mayn't believe it because ghosts are rather out of date—we have complexes and ectoplasms instead—but there is something very strange and unpleasant about that castle.

Centuries ago a man attempted to murder his wife in a room at the end of a long passage. She escaped, wounded and half-dead, staggered down the corridor, across the Mary Stuart room, and flung herself out of a window.

Nowadays the whole wing suffers from strange noises. No dog can be forced into it. No one attempts to induce a human being to enter it. If I were to spend a night in that so-called haunted room, it would really be brave, because I should be terrified out of my senses. In fact I could not do it.

Yet my sister-in-law slept there several times and asserted that she watched the ghosts' antics with interest.

The test of courage is the fight it can put up against fear. The finest pluck is that of the self-conscious coward who forces himself into battle.

That is the courage most working women bring

to life, to the day when there are so many tedious jobs to do that they don't know how their tired muscles will get through them. It is the courage that every mother puts into her children's training, and it is just as fine as the pluck that won an English girl the Croix de Guerre with palms in the Great War. Here is the story:

E—— was nineteen and she lied about her age to get to the front as an ambulance driver. After a year she was head of a six-machine convoy.

One night an advance field hospital was shelled. E——'s convoy was ordered to evacuate it. They left their machines in a wood, and, under the instructions of the doctor, carried out what was left of the wounded. The shelling was still going on. When the last case was safely aboard, E—— told the convoy to return to the base hospital. One by one the cars swung out of the wood. The commandant's would naturally be the last, only, on this occasion, it did not occupy its usual place at the tail of the line.

E—— watched the grey-green ambulances disappear and then she returned to the battered shed. It was like a shambles. She dared not look up, for human fragments were shell-plastered on roof and walls. Methodically, with an electric torch, she examined every corner to see if any living thing lay hidden under the dead.

She found two men, mutilated but still breathing. Laboriously she dragged them out, hauled them into her ambulance, and departed only when she was convinced that no life was left in what, a few hours ago, had been a hospital.

"Were you frightened?" I asked her afterward.

"I was sick with fear," she said.

That is the bravest thing I know, and it was purely mental. The mind won its fight against the body.

I fancy there is more courage in the world than we think. We hear about it only when it is spectacular. It belongs, in a different measure, to every country; it belongs to men and women. But perhaps the balance is in favour of women, for they have to put up the hardest fight against nerves, health, and circumstance; in fact, against the centuries-old heritage of Eve.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ODYSSEY OF A SAMBUKH

**M**OST people assure me that it is impossible to pick out any particular moment as the best or worst in their lives, but I know without any shadow of doubt what was the worst physical ordeal of my heaped-up, though often incomplete, experiences. Not for all the gold of Ephesus would I repeat that fourteen-day journey in a leaking, wind-racked and most unsavoury dhow, symbol of perpetual motion and such violent nausea that one of the Arab sailors remarked to me; "Had I thy middle, I should throw myself and it into the sea!"

When, after eighteen months of intermittent negotiations, Sayed Mustapha el Idrisi finally invited me to visit Asir, I was warned by an Arab that, in all probability, his cousin, the late Emir, had little to do with the invitation. "No foreigners are allowed in that country," he said; "it is for Moslems only. Be assured that if you land at Hodeidah you will be received courteously, entertained with the utmost hospitality, and dismissed before you have set foot outside the town."

Determined not to miss the chance of learning more about an almost unknown country which was then the Naboth's vineyard of King Hussein, Ibn Saoud and the Imam Yehya, I decided to give Hodeidah a wide berth and attempt to sail direct to Jizan, 150 miles farther north, and the winter head-quarters of the Idrisi, by means of a sambukh from the African



coast. With this object in view, I went to Port Sudan and set about looking for a dhow—cautiously, because I was not certain how my scheme would be regarded by a paternal Government which strongly objects to wasting departmental time over such “unfortunate incidents” as a subject or two getting lost, stolen or strayed.

The first few days were disappointing. Not only were there no available sambukhs, but the local sailors insisted that they had never heard of Jizan.

One raïs (captain) doubtfully offered to land me at Lith, in the Hedjaz, but volunteered the information that we should probably be captured by the Dhuwwi Hassan, who, with their neighbours, the Dhuwwi Barakat, the tribe which butchered the unfortunate survivors of the *Emden*, are notorious pirates.

Other headmen produced more and more unpleasant stories of slave traffic along the Arabian coast, till, after I had been five days in Port Sudan, an old man sailed in, in a sambukh full of salt, and it appeared that not only had he once been to Jizan, some forty-five years ago, but that, for £70 Egyptian, he was willing to go there again.

“I will not go near the Italian land,” he said, “for there are bad men and robbers in those parts, and there are two places from which the slave dhows come, where no man is safe, but, if you will let me keep out at sea the whole way, I will take you in safety, Insha-allah,” and he spoke of the infamous Zaraniq tribe, whose territory is south of Hodeidah, but who creep up the Idrisi coast and out to the Farisan Isles in search of prey; and of the Zubeid, who make a fat living by looting sambukhs.

My spirits fell at the idea of weeks in an open boat in the middle of the Red Sea, with a temperature of 92 deg. Fahr. in the shade; but the old man was

adamant, and the bargain was finally struck with the aid of the kindly harbour-master, Captain Higgs. Explaining to me, with a twinkle which belied his caution, that his spirit of adventure had been killed by years of routine, he threw himself with zest into the conspiracy which was to allow a certain dhow, apparently as devoid of passengers as of cargo, to slip away unsuspected in the middle of the night.

An Egyptian, Kamel Effendi Fahmi, an intimate friend of Sayed Mustapha, had kindly agreed to accompany me, and we crept on board in starlight while a swarm of cat-like creatures, nude except for a loin-cloth, hustled our luggage after us. The raïs, distinguished by his red turban, murmured comfort as we acquired our first bruises, and warnings with regard to the inadvisability of showing a light. Captain Higgs wished us luck in a voice which was almost as suitable for a conspirator as my hollow whispers. Then, with the first streak of dawn, our craft was gliding out of harbour, and, as I remembered bitterly afterwards, that was the last bit of gliding she did on the journey.

For the benefit of those who are fortunate enough never to have travelled in a dhow, I must explain that the *Khadra* was an open boat, between 30 and 40 feet long and perhaps 10 feet wide, with a depth of some 5 feet in the middle. Her crew of eight lived on a small decked-in space some 9 feet by 7 feet, which they shared with the rudder, while Kamel Fahmi and I camped under a piece of canvas below. Now, at this season, a very strong south or south-east wind blows up the Red Sea (the "Azzieb"). As the crow flies, it is 350 miles from Port Sudan to Jizan, but this adverse wind generally prolongs the journey and forces sailing-craft to hug the coast as long as possible. As we had insufficient ballast, none being obtainable in a hurry at Port Sudan, the *Khadra* stood right out of

the water, and the least ripple swayed her, while any thing in the nature of a swell reduced her to the consistency of a cork. She did not roll or pitch in the ordinary sense of the word. She wallowed in great, heaving circles. She lurched up again with a sickening spin, to crash back with a loving attempt to absorb as much of the ocean as possible into her empty interior.

Moreover, the Odyssey of a sambukh is expressed in smells. Subtle and unmistakable, superimposed one upon another, yet losing none of their original force, there drifted round me the stench of every cargo the *Khadra* had ever carried. At one time she must have been laden with dried fish—I could almost see the bones sticking out of shadowy corners. I recognized the sickly smell of salt, the fetid odour of wet doura, and the muskiness of long-forgotten coffee. The thin cat, which crept about and licked all our provisions, had not completely dispatched her victims—some must have slunk beyond her reach and rotted in the interstices of the boards—but beyond and above all this *soufflé* of smell was a pervading reek of stale seaweed from the rocks which had been hastily torn from the reef to take the place of sand ballast.

Idly, while I thought of the *Khadra's* past as apparent to my nose, I had been watching a thin dark line which trickled across a corner of my bedding. Finally I put out a finger to examine the mystery. Bugs! Twenty-two little, round, brown ones were making for home under my pillow, but the twenty-third was fat and squelchy. I waited for no more, but made for the air and the dizzy swing of the rudder platform, where in future I camped day and night with a compass and charts, a mattress, and some tins of sausages, which were easy to heat on the box of charcoal fixed in the middle of the restricted deck. Round

this lived and slept, prayed, ate and smoked the curiously mixed crew.

There was Saeed, the son of the raïs, a startlingly black person, born of a Sudani mother, who never left the rudder unless "abu salama" (porpoises) were sighted, when he would rush to the bows, with a spear ready to throw if any incautious fish rolled within reach. The brothers Hamad were light brown Hedjazis with curling hair and beards, who were never seen without their long pipes, and they had a small kinsman, Ali, who looked like one of Andrea del Sarto's angel children till suddenly he shaved his curls, and from a boy of twelve turned into a stunted youth of twenty. There was Salim, the slave, and Mohammed, who never spoke during the day, but at night, having cleaned the last grain of rice from the deepest crack in the common platter, used to tell amazing stories of fishermen and jinns, to which the last and smallest member of the crew, the little black Ahmed, listened with eyes almost as large as his preternaturally enormous mouth.

The first sunset found us anchored within the reef a little north of the islets of Tella Kebir and Tella Szerir. With a north-east wind, changing to east, we had come 69 miles down the coast, but the two following days the wind was from the south, and we lay helplessly rolling in company of two other sambukhs. Saeed caught us fish in the shallow water, and it was while watching his skill with the round, lead-weighted net, which he flung ahead of him whenever he saw a patch of silver, that the idea came to me of camping on the patch of sand to which I had paddled in the huri—a 12-foot canoe about 18 inches wide, scooped out of a single piece of wood.

The islet was full of curious holes, and it was very damp, but at least, it was motionless. One glance at



the swinging *Khadra* decided me. "Fetch my kit," I told Mohammed. He waved his hands and murmured "Bish-Bish." Saeed joined him and shouted the same word, but as I did not understand what it meant, I ignored them, and rolling myself up under a bit of scrub prepared to wait. Perhaps I slept for a few minutes; in any case I lay very still, and when I opened my eyes I thought I was in the middle of one of those horrible nightmares from which one cannot awake, though one knows they are unreal. The island had turned yellow. Moreover, it was moving—a fantastic, heaped-up, writhing movement. Everything moved; and everywhere bits of yellow heaved up above the rest and scuttled hither and thither. In fact, from every hole which made the surface of the islet like a sponge had come crabs—fat, long-legged, yellow crabs. As soon as I stirred, there was chaos. Pink, bulgy crabs emerged from under the yellow ones, and with startling rapidity the whole mass scuttled to the sea or helter-skelter into the holes. At one moment there was a seething stretch of long legs working furiously, of unpleasant bodies piled one upon another. The next there were a few bubbles in the sand and some yellow patches rapidly disappearing under the waves—but I no longer wanted to camp on that patch of sand.

By 1 a.m. on that night (November 12) the wind had swung round to the east, and the raïs was shouting: "We start; let us start"; and then, to a neighbouring dhow: "Ya Masri—oh, Egyptian—Start!" With a chanted "Alù, Allah! Alù, Allah!" ("The sails, oh God!") we slipped from the protection of the reef and beat out to sea against the wind, to discover if the elements were more favourable away from the coast; but were driven in again, 39 miles to the south, and anchored outside Akik, beside a flat island decorated

with the remains of two recent wrecks, which provided us with fish for our dinner. It was fortunate that we were capable of eating it, for the wind had been strong that day and as we bore down full speed, carrying a large amount of canvas, on the narrow opening into the reef the sails stuck for a second. We missed the passage, and the raïs flung the rudder round a fraction too late. There was a faint jarring grind, and water seemed to leap at me as I crouched in the stern. Then, amidst a pandemonium of shouting, I was hurled across the charcoal box on to a water-barrel, while heavy chests slid after me, but luckily, by the time I had picked myself up, drenched and bruised, the *Khadra* had recovered her balance. She had knocked a hole in her starboard side, and, henceforth, Ali spent much of his time baling out most evil-smelling water. I understand, too, that a portion of sha-ab (coral reef) adhered to us until the boat was dragged ashore at Jizan and subjected to a week's overhauling.

On November 13 we started at 3 a.m., but only achieved 13 miles in a choppy sea before anchoring off Ras Abid, and the following day we experienced our first really bad weather. We made good pace in the morning, but the wind strengthened towards evening to an easterly gale, and white crests seemed to embrace the labouring *Khadra*.

Apart from being permanently seasick, by this time I felt as if my spine were being crashed through the top of my head with each downward lurch, so, when the raïs put in to the Eritrean coast and anchored in shallow water, where there was no reef and no protection from the wind, I insisted on going ashore. It was no easy task in such a sea, but choosing the moment when the huri swung up on the crest of a wave, I dropped into it and was landed, completely soaked, but still clutching a blanket and a pan of char-

coal. We had come 44 miles and were within sight of a post of native askari, marked on the chart as "Stone House," but called by the Arabs, "Taqlein." As we had no papers and no desire to be asked our business, Saeed and I hid our fire in a hollow among the sand mounds, and crawled to and from the huri with the utmost caution; but I slept like a log in spite of wet garments, and was furious to be awakened shortly after midnight with the announcement that the wind had gone down and the raïs wanted to start.

This time we sailed for thirty-four hours, for, though we picked up the light of Difnein (62 miles) after sunset on November 15, there was so little breeze that we did not reach the island till 11 a.m. on the 16th.

After the indescribable filth of the sambukh, the crystal-clear water in the shelter of rocks and scrub tempted us to bathe, so we camped for the night, and only started beating south towards Harmil the following morning.

That day the raïs's sense of direction left him, and when, after sunset, we anchored near a group of islets with a curious coral formation in the shape of a giant T sticking out of the reef, he confessed he did not know where we were. Generally, though he liked to hear that his landmarks appeared on the chart (often by different names) he scorned my compass. "At sea we look at the sun and the stars," said Saeed, "and near the reef we pray."

On the morning of the 18th there was much argument, after which the crew decided, but without much spontaneity, that we were at Kad-hu. As this is charted as a single island, and as we could already see several different islets, I insisted on treating the nearest as Tanam, 28 miles from Difnein. On this supposition I took a bearing on Harmil from the chart, and kept the boat to this course, amidst half-hearted expostu-



lations, which faded away altogether when we passed land which resembled the Wusta and Isratu groups.

"Allah Akbar! Allah Karim!" exclaimed the raïs, when Harmil duly appeared in the afternoon after a certain amount of suspense caused by unidentified rocks; but he said nothing about my compass. As we came into the bay, a mass of wreckage drifted past us, with several bales which looked like carpets and native clothing, but the sea was too bad to tempt the greed of the crew. The wind was blowing up for its usual evening gale, so I decided to sleep ashore, as the wide flat sweep of Harmil gave little shelter to the sambukh. With infinite labour we put up a tent on the soft ground, but the noise of straining rope and canvas only ceased when, at dawn—by which time everything was inches deep in sand—the whole thing collapsed on my head.

After that the wind began to go down, and since Saeed had spent several hours "plumbing" the worst deficiencies in our reef-battered craft, at 2.30 p.m. (November 19) we started on the longest lap of our journey, steering for Sorso in the Farisan Islands, in a strong south-south-east wind. As soon as we left Harmil we came into a heavy, white-crested swell, but we travelled well, and the men grew more cheerful. Elated by my success at finding Harmil, I urged them to steer north of east to avoid the main bulk of Farisan, of whose regard for strangers the raïs expressed himself so doubtful that he had produced four rifles, and urged me to follow suit with my revolvers. Saeed smiled and said nothing, for he had recovered his sense of direction. All that night we sailed, and the next day; after which everyone began to worry as to where on earth we were going. "Wallahi! I do not like this work," said Abdul Kheir; "it is dangerous to go into the reef at night. We must stay at sea."



But naturally I could not agree with him. The sight of anything as solid as a reef would be Paradise for me, besides which I was very anxious about Kamel Fahmi, who by this time was seriously ill.

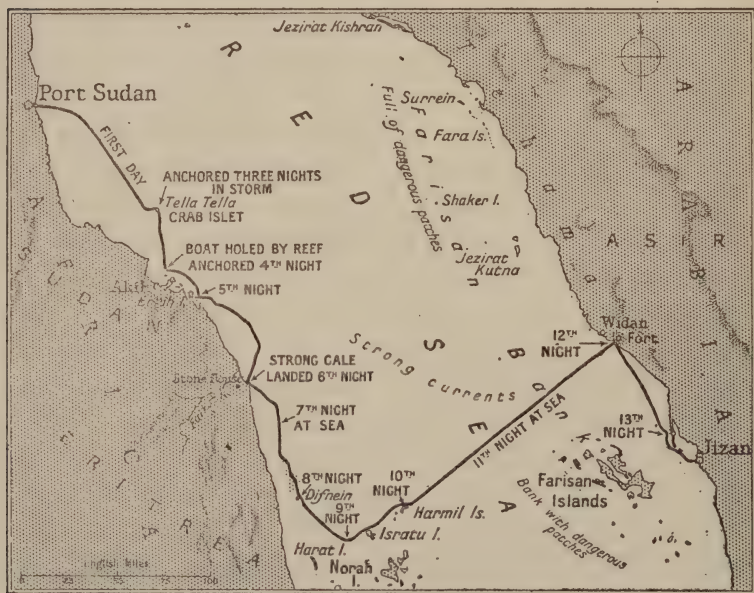
Our drinking water was practically exhausted, but this did not affect the Arabs, who, on long dhow journeys when they follow the winds from Persia to Bombay, or Aden to Zanzibar, are in the habit of diluting their fresh water with salt, so that by the end of the second month they are drinking the sea waves neat.

For food, we were reduced to the fish we could catch with a trawling line. I remember that particular day produced a monster, a fabulous cross between a conger eel and a shark. When the combined efforts of the crew had hauled the brute on board, its struggles nearly upset us. Pursued by half a dozen knives—personally I thought nothing but dynamite or first-class exorcism would finish the mythological creature—it flopped off the rudder platform on to Kamel Fahmi, who lay semi-conscious below. The breath must have been nearly knocked out of his body and he woke with a gulp, felt the swirl of bilge water over his feet and the slither of scales on his face, so decided that he was already dead and at the bottom of the sea! It took considerable argument and some physical force to convince him that we had not been shipwrecked; but after that no one had much time to talk, for the *Khadra* was leaking like a sponge. It was only by baling in relays that we kept her afloat, and, hourly, the water gained on us.

Fortunately, just before 2 a.m. on the 21st, by which time the crew were trying to wedge what was left of their rags into the starboard rent, not only land, but mountains, loomed in front of us. There was hardly any swell, so we anchored some way out, and,

with a muttered "God is great," Saced dropped the rudder and in two minutes was asleep at my feet, while the old raïs shook his head. "Only Allah knows where we are!" he muttered disconsolately, as he lay down and drew an incredibly dirty quilt over his face.

The crew slept in turns till the sky was aflame and the land red-gold with that peculiar glow of desert



THE VOYAGE TO JIZAN

Arabia, between the blue of mountain and sea. A few palms broke the line of sand, and a couple of smaller hills stood between the distant escarpment and the shore. One of these we identified as Jebel Rakab el Kudain on the coast of Asir, some 60 miles north-east of the island for which we had been steering. "You wanted to go to the north, ya Sitt!" cackled the raïs, and I had to join in the hearty laugh at my expense.

An unexpected current and the heavy swell had

swept us right out of our course, and round the northern limit of the Farisan group, so that, though we had travelled 120 miles in the 39½ hours since leaving Harmil, we were still 60 or 70 miles from Jizan, which now lay south-east of us.

All that day we crept down the coast, half-water-logged, but tacking clumsily back and forth against a south wind, yet the long promontory of Ras Turfa never seemed to grow any nearer. There were other sambukhs about, pearl fishers perhaps, for this is one of the principal trades of Jizan, but we kept away from them as much as possible and anchored at sunset, just off the sandy neck which guards the Khor Abu-s-Saba.

While the stars were still bright we were off again, tacking round the headland and along the narrow strip of Ferafer Island. The south wind still held, but we saw the "Gebel" of Jizan at 7.30 a.m. and crept slowly closer all the morning till we could see the shape of the rocks jutting out in a spur from the flat "sabakha" on either side. The white sails were slipping in one by one, and gradually we could make out the dark mass of houses north of the old Turkish fort, crowned with the Idrisi's guns. At last, just after 2 p.m., the *Khadra* found her way into the reef and anchored in the double line of sambukhs under the shelter of the cliff. "Allah is generous," said the raïs, as he started changing his loin-cloth for a garment which looked like a night-shirt.

We had been fourteen days on board, and taking our journey point to point, had done 469 miles.

"Never again," I said to Kamel Fahmi, who had miraculously recovered at sight of land, as I crawled under the awning to change into native dress.

## CHAPTER XI

### GUESTS OF A HERMIT EMIR

JIZAN was the starting-point of a journey by car, camel and donkey through southern Asir and the flat strip of Yemen which lies between mountains and sea. I had hoped to go up into the highlands where Ibn Saoud was then raiding his enemy King Hussein, but that thrilling project did not materialize. However, some account of what is still approximately unknown country may fitly find place among these impressions of adventure.

It was no easy matter landing at Jizan, muffled in the folds of an Egyptian habbara over a long tight-sleeved dress of magenta silk embroidered with gold, for I could hardly see through the double thickness of my veil and my heelless slippers always fell off at the critical moment, while the sun beat fiercely on my head, inadequately protected by the thin silk covering. The water is so shallow that even the canoes cannot go right inshore, so I finished my journey on a sort of rope tray, borne shoulder high by four swollen-muscle porters accustomed to carrying out 500-lb. loads of skins, coffee and flour to the waiting sambukhs. Deposited suddenly at the feet of an exceedingly good-looking young Arab in an azure robe, whom I afterwards found out was Sayed el Abed, cousin of the Idrisi, I could think of absolutely nothing to say; but, fortunately, all the sheikhs who came down to meet me were so embarrassed at being in the presence of a woman that my silence passed unnoticed.



We shuffled up through the sand to the guest-house of the Sayeds, a curious building, half-fortress, half-dwelling, which proved to contain some comfortable rooms, furnished with hard divans covered with carpets and rows of stiff bolsters.

Here, after a ceremonious visit from Sayed es Senussi, the late Idrisi's vicegerant at Jizan, we were given a mighty meal, consisting of a sheep stuffed with almonds, raisins, rice, hard-boiled eggs, and all sorts of spice, and flanked with dates which had come by sea from Basrah, bitter limes, and olives served on oyster shells, bowls of curdled milk, and sweet sticky pastes, pink-fleshed water-melons, whole chickens and reddish-black millet bread. The repast was served by soldiers of the Idrisi's own guard, which numbers 500 picked men from Sabya and Abu Arish. When they stacked their rifles in a corner of the room, they looked rather like dancing girls, with their bunches of neat, well-oiled ringlets under a silver fillet, fine long features and well-cut mouths, whose curves were as feminine as their lithe boneless bodies. They wore kilts (futahs) of striped Yemeni cloths and little boleros of mauve or primrose linen, which were most picturesque, but somewhat out of keeping with their immense cartridge belts and the curved silver swords attached to them.

Asir is an ascetic and primitive country, where life is divided between work, prayer, eating and sleeping. The day begins with the dawn and ends three hours after sunset, when a drum is beaten loudly round the town as a sign for people to keep inside their own walls. The ladies never leave their houses, where they occupy a single inferior apartment isolated from the main building, which generally contains two rooms almost as high as they are long. In the street you only see servant girls scurrying along to the bazaars in

crimson tobhs (straight dresses) with black veils, red bordered, over their heads.

Portly merchants, with huge turbans of saffron, rose and orange, ride by on minute grey donkeys, almost lost amidst the riders' drapery. Fuzzy-headed Bedouin, naked to the waist, their bodies gleaming with oil, drive strings of camels laden with firewood at 4d. a load. Here are fish merchants with their silvery wares spread out on leaf platters. Here is a pearl seller with his precious grains tied in a scrap of scarlet muslin. A few yards down the narrow alley, roofed with mats, you may buy a basket of custard apples for a farthing, or hammered-silver belts that tinkle with a score of bells, or a tiny piece of raw black amber, which, as everyone knows, is the very best charm against the evil eye. A little farther on small boys in golden yellow, with daggers almost as big as themselves, will sell you anything from a camel at £4 to a chicken at 1½d. Life is cheap in Asir and luxury is forbidden. There are no cafés and no dancers, smoking is a punishable offence, and gold so sinful a thing that the Idrisi will not even have it in his house. For this reason my gift of a gold watch and seals was somewhat unfortunate, but the Emir's tact was equal to the occasion.

It had been arranged that I should pass as Kamel Fahmi's sister, as no European woman had ever been seen in the country; but even my strictly Moslem dress and behaviour did not prevent crowds following us as we wandered through the markets, with a rising murmur, "These are not of the sons of Adam."

Fortunately, my companion was a great personal friend of the Idrisi family, so, after two days at Jizan, the Emir commanded his presence at Sabya, the summer capital, 25 miles away. A Ford car was put at our disposal, and a Turkish chauffeur, obviously under the

impression that it was a tank, for he avoided nothing smaller than a sandhill, and did his best to wreck our nerves with his precipitous dashes through scrub, rock and wadi. In order to do honour to Fahmi, who had rendered his family signal services in Egypt, the Idrisi sent a guard of fifty horsemen to meet the car half-way to the capital, and these careered wildly around, showing off their horsemanship at the expense of their steeds, mostly half-broken stallions bred from Nejd stock.

Sabya, with some 20,000 inhabitants, lies between two small tabular hills called Gebel Aquar, where emeralds are supposed to be found. It is divided into two parts. The old town, at the foot of Aquar el Yemeni, consists chiefly of the same pointed huts (areesh) as Jizan; but in the new "city" the Idrisi was completing quite an imposing stone-built palace, surrounded by the houses of his ministers and the chief merchants.

The Hermit of Arabia—so called because he used to shut himself up for months, though business of State could only be conducted when he descended to his liwan, and because he preferred a life of philosophical, religious and judicial study to the political power which had been thrust upon him by circumstances—was an imposing figure, very tall and dignified, with the dark skin inherited from his negroid grandmother rather than his Indian mother. Disinterested, just, sincere, and fabulously generous, he had a great reputation amongst the Bedouin, who considered that "Allah always helped the Imam,"<sup>1</sup> and looked upon him as the peacemaker of Arabia and the final court of appeal against Ibn Saoud, King Hussein and the Imam Yehya of Sana. He had a critical appreciation of British administration, and often, in discussing some injudicious action of post-war years, he

<sup>1</sup> "Imam" means a religious leader and, in this case, refers to the Idrisi and not to Imam Yehya.



said: "At heart the English are sound. These are only small things."

In spite of this admiration for our powers of organizing, the Idrisi appeared to have a great antipathy to foreigners, and would neither allow them to enter his country nor meet them, unless in the case of a very rare official visit, which, if he could not depute to his cousin, he received as near the edge of the waves as possible. This may have been due to a strain of mystic reserve in his character, or to the belief that his country had not yet reached the state where it could benefit by association with Europe.

Outside the towns, the people are wild and savage—primitive creatures, half-nude, with shocks of coarse hair, distrustful and suspicious, almost pagan, believing in a hundred superstitions, and wearing as amulets polished black stones which must surely be relics of the pre-Islamic stone worship which existed in ancient Yemen. I have often seen the Asir Bedouins say the Moslem prayers with their backs to Mecca and their faces turned to the sun.

When I was in Asir, the Idrisi had made a treaty with Ibn Saoud, by which his eastern frontiers were guaranteed, while he supplied famine-haunted Riyadh with thousands of live stock—sheep, goats and cattle. With King Hussein, who then reigned on the north, he preserved friendly relations—at least outwardly—though the Sherif of Mecca, whose ambition was not limited either by common sense or honesty, continually subsidized the rebellious Hassan ibn Aidh against him. On the south he was involved in a mild and not very dangerous warfare with Imam Yehya, chiefly because all the tribes of the Tehama as far south as Taiz wished to come under his rule.

It was a remarkable fact that the Idrisi had never fought for anything for himself. It was the demand



of the people that made him gradually extend his sway until the little state, where his family had been but one among many more important religious houses, had become the key to the problem of Western Arabia. Only the Idrisi had remained unchanged, and, if any of his ministers tried to involve him in too complicated politics, he would shut himself up in Sabya and deliver lectures on the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet. His only human weakness was a penchant for green tea and scent; his only pleasure listening to the astounding voice of his Imam echoing (I had almost written "bellowing") over roof and wall in a recitation of the Koran, which lasted from soon after midnight till dawn.

I must confess, however, that his obstinacy equalled his intelligence, and he was looked upon as the most learned man in Arabia, having taken the highest degrees which the famous el Azhar can bestow. Not all the eloquence of Kamel Fahmi, who argued with him for seven hours on end, while Sayed es Senussi, the Qadi, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Minister of the Interior sat mute and anxious, could induce him to allow us to go north. "The best of my country lies to the south," he repeated

I sought to comfort my disappointment with his gift of a small silver box filled with pearls.

There are no roads in Asir, and the traveller who would go beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Sabya and Jizan, or the flat strip of sabakha which borders the coast, must resign himself to the use of donkeys, or a particularly small and thin breed of baggage camel. As soon as we left Miklaf el Yemen, the central province of the 270-mile by 80-mile strip over which the Idrisi exercised effective control, we were offered the choice of all the steeds of the neighbourhood.

"Ala kaifik—at your pleasure," said Jusuf, the plump wakil with incredibly long eyelashes, who had been appointed to accompany us, trying to look as if he could conjure up all the horses of Araby for our use.

"We will go as far as possible in the car," said I firmly, "and then we will take mules."

"Taht amrik—under your orders" answered Jusuf mournfully, making a mental calculation of the number of mules in the country. I think there were perhaps six!

Thus it came about that the fierce-looking Turk, who always took both hands off the wheel to gesticulate whenever a particularly large obstacle loomed in front, drove us to Madai, the largest village of the Masareka tribe. We went through a land of mirage, where laden camels turned into rocks, trees took to themselves legs, and straw-hatted women looked like islands in the middle of a lake.

Gradually the flat desert, with its mounds covered with rough grass and scrub, gave way to stretches of cultivation, doura, dukn and sem-sem, with tamarisk and mimosa in the wadi beds, and feathery tamarind trees, under whose shade goatherds slept in the noon heat. We saw gazelles and numbers of vultures and kites, but met nobody till the conical huts of Madai appeared amidst fields of grain, where blue-robed women toiled with sickle and hoe. "Man is born to fight, woman to work," said one of my companions. "Man carries the gun, woman the tools and the child," added another. I said I thought she was overloaded, and turned my attention to the crowd of wild figures who had rushed out to meet us brandishing staves and rifles. Jusuf was a trifle pale. "Wallahi! Traveling is not a pursuit for wise men," he said, and leaned out to impart the news of our great station and our close friendship with "his holiness the ruler."

His eloquence produced immediate effect, and we were taken to the cluster of huts belonging to Sayed Omar el Barr, a Government official, who received us warmly and put his whole dwelling at our disposal. It was very cool in the "areesh," which were lined with clay a couple of feet thick and furnished with a few rope couches. There was a hearth made of mud, with holes shaped to fit the various vessels, and the walls were decorated with rows of woven grass mats, platters, bowls, hats and other domestic objects. A woman brought me coffee in a clay jar. "I have never seen anyone so clean," she said, looking wonderingly at my skin, which I had dyed a beautiful olive colour by the aid of some bottles from Clarkson's. Embarrassed, I took a great gulp of coffee and nearly choked. It was indescribably nauseous, made of husks, raw ginger, cardamom and cinnamon. "Isn't it good?" asked a slave, seeing my anguished expression.

"Oh yes, yes!" I gasped, and added truthfully, "I've never found its equal anywhere."

It was at Madai that I saw the curious custom of ordeal by water. A young hillman was accused of murder. His tribe ordained that he must undergo the test of the water-bowl and the red-hot spoon. A sheikh who had the necessary powers was summoned. The headmen and their families gathered round a brushwood fire.

The old "fikki," or wise man, filled a little gourd and set it beside him. Then he prayed that the water, being the purest element in the desert, might reveal if blood-guilt stained the district. There was a breathless silence. The gourd is supposed to move slowly round the circle and stop in front of the murderer. I suppose it is on the same principle as table-turning, or any other form of levitation. I have seen some tables jump about in quite inexplicable fashion, and I saw that

bowl move! I can't explain either phenomenon. The gourd slid slowly over the sand, completed the circle and returned to the wise man. The first part of the ordeal was safely over. Water had found no pollution among those present.

The fikki turned to heat his spoon and the sheikh beside me murmured that the accused had fever. "His tongue is as dry as the sand. It will assuredly stick to the metal," he insisted.

When the young man approached the fire, it was obvious that his temperature was abnormal. The wise man felt his hand. It was like sacking dried in a mangle. There was no moisture about his body. Still, he professed himself ready for the ordeal.

"Is there none of thy family to stand proxy for thee?" asked the fikki.

Instantly a woman burst into the circle. Before anyone could protest, she rinsed her mouth in the "magic" water and stretched out her tongue towards the spoon. The metal was red-hot and the wise man held it at arm's length, so that no deception was possible. Three times the girl licked the spoon and then the headmen gathered round to examine her tongue. There was only a very faint smear at the tip, which disappeared when she licked it.

"Clean," pronounced the fikki, and the woman turned towards the hillman she had saved. He was a fine figure in his indigo kilt and turban, with a sheep-skin flung across his shoulder and his bare chest crossed with cartridge belts.

The woman looked up at him, smiling. There was a stir among the watchers, but the two who stood apart saw nothing but the expression in each other's eyes.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE MENACE OF A CROWD

**T**WELVE or fifteen miles after leaving Madai, we plunged into a region of sandhills covered with alga grass, and, while labouring up them, Ahmed entertained us with tales of brigands. Pointing to unpleasantly frequent cairns of stones, he assured us these were graves, but whether of the victims or the murderers it was difficult to discover, for it appeared that the Idrisi had waged such determined warfare on the marauders that there were hardly any of them left.

"In the Turkish times, the big sheikhs used to make much money stealing children and selling them in the towns," remarked Jusuf; "but now there is law and order everywhere." Perhaps it was only my fancy that he sighed.

East of us lay a wide expanse of desert, rising into low waves, where a few trees were visible, but never sufficiently uneven to hide the double line of hill and mountain farther inland. We were making for Midi, the second largest town, with a population of some 10,000.

It was very hot and we looked helplessly for shade in a waste of sand. There was not a tree or dune in sight, only two little mounds of stone. Beside one of these we huddled to eat tepid water-melon and native bread. I was almost sick with the heat. Trying to burrow down among the stones for a few inches of shade, I disarranged the cairn. There was something inside—rags of red stuff, and a white fragment

that, for a second, gleamed like flesh. My heart, or whatever it is we have inside us, somersaulted into my solar plexus. "What is it?" I asked with a gulp of nausea.

"You know our law?" returned the fat Jusuf, the Emir's wakil, who chaperoned me. "When a woman is unfaithful, she and her lover are taken into the desert, buried in the sand up to their armpits and stoned to death. Then more rocks are heaped above them and they are left as a warning to the foolish." His voice was quite unmoved. He knew exactly what lay under the battered stones. I could only imagine it.

Haradh, where some beautifully carved stone dogs were discovered in a recent washout, was left behind, and, as we travelled towards the coast, we saw great blocks of stone towering out of grass, grey and sun-dried. "Graves," said Ahmed. "Perhaps of the Time of Ignorance!"

I insisted on a closer examination. Many of the big coral slabs had fallen, but, of the hundred or so which stood upright, the largest were from eight to twelve feet high and three feet across, with a breadth of a foot.

"They are very old; no one knows how old," remarked one of our attendants. "Perhaps they belong to the Hillaliyeh; who knows but Abu Zeyd<sup>1</sup> may be buried here?"

The graves, which were intact, were edged with thick slabs of the same rock, and were about eight feet long, and the whole cemetery covered several acres, but there were no inscriptions.

Later, I invited some learned sheikhs to explain this interesting mystery. Sherif Hamud suggested that perhaps the stones dated from the time of the Persian occupation, A.D. 600, but Ahmed Taher, whose

<sup>1</sup> A legendary mediæval Arab hero.

father was known as "The Sheikh of Sheikhs," began to talk about ghouls. I listened, amazed, while a wild argument raged as to whether Ibrahim, the son of Mohammed, had really seen these unpleasant creatures when his straying camels led him near the forest of stones.

"The Hillaliyeh were Moslems," almost shouted the sherif, "and the Faithful are with Allah after death. How, then, could the man have seen ghouls?"

But Ahmed Taher inclined to the idea that Ibrahim's testimony of eye and ear must be accepted, and that this proved beyond all doubt that the graves were pre-Islam, belonging to those pagan times when certainly spirits walked abroad.

Midi is an imposing town when viewed from the east, for then it appears as if the whole central portion consists of large, solidly-built, stone houses, faced with ornate plaster work; but to the north it is fringed with Bedouin encampments, which give it a ragged and unkempt appearance. We arrived unexpectedly one exceedingly hot afternoon—the temperature varied between 80° and 86° Fahr. during late November, December, and January, but there was always a damp south wind, which made the climate very trying. The sheikh was out, but we were ushered into his reception room, which was exceedingly dirty and full of flies. "Bring the furniture," screamed a score of voices; and boys ran in laden with carpets and cushions, with which they proceeded to cover some of the dirt, though the flies still reigned supreme.

The room was typical of an old-fashioned Asir house, for it was about 40 feet long and 18 feet wide, and so high that it had rather the appearance of an aisle, with its ceiling supported on large beams, and painted in all manner of irregular designs. The arches that served as windows were protected by finely-carved

shutters, above which ran a plaster dado of texts from the Koran, and between them the whole wall-space was covered with painted Indian plates. Further adornment was given by rows of mirrors hung so high that they only reflected the ceiling and numbers of pictures of legendary Arab heroes. A high and very narrow divan ran all round this remarkable room, with the exception of a space devoted to beautifully-carved travelling chests, inlaid with brass, and fitted with innumerable little drawers and trays. These are made locally.

Eight lean cats watched us with hungry eyes, so I went out into the sunshine, and, guided by the flutter of a woman's dress, I found an angle of house and outer wall devoted to a coffee hearth on a large scale. Here crouched several of the sheikh's harem, Abyssinian, Sudanese, Turkish, and Arabic, varying in rank from the wives and daughters of my host to black slaves captured as children "in the mountains across the sea," and sold in the markets of Yemen and Hedjaz.

"Don't you pull out your eyebrows in Egypt?" asked the mother of the sheikh, who had only one tooth, which hung out of her mouth like a tube. "I thought you were very civilized."

I looked at the black bar painted across her brow in lieu of hair, and the orange-pink powder falling from her embroidered head-dress, but, before I had time to answer, somebody else remarked in a tone of horror: "I have heard it said—Allah forbid!—that there are Christians in Egypt."

Hastily I protested complete ignorance of so dangerous a subject, but Fatma persisted. "If a Christian came to this country," she said, and spat vindictively at the name, "the people would 'eat' him!" and she made an unpleasant gesture of tearing something to bits with strong, claw-like fingers.



I tried to turn the conversation, but the crone's curiosity was aroused. "Had I thy grey eyes," she said, "I should not travel far in this country," and she recited with relish the tale of a Turkish doctor who had visited an inland village during an epidemic. "He had grey eyes like yours, and they were not sure if he were an infidel, but they dug out his middle to see!"

By this time, of course, my face must have been as anæmic as a suet pudding and the collar of my scarlet and gold dress seemed to be getting tighter every moment.

I was thankful when the old woman offered me a bath, and I hurried away, hoping that the apartment might be mercifully secluded, for I was beginning to imagine myself with luminous, sea-green orbs of incredible candle-power.

The bathroom, an empty, roughly-plastered cube with a hole in one corner of the floor to allow the water to run away, was in an outer court, and thither, a dozen women accompanied me with rose-water and various herbal pastes. It was only when the door was shut upon us and Haseena, an Abyssinian with gums so black and teeth so white that her smile was a curiosity, was ladling out water from the huge jar, that I remembered my beautiful olive-dye only reached as far as chest and elbow—and here were expectant slaves waiting to wash me!

The remarks about Christians hammered in my head as I fumbled with the choking folds of my habbara.

Then inspiration came. My fingers had closed round something soft and sticky in my pocket. It was a piece of soap and, without a moment's hesitation, I put it in my mouth. A little vigorous sucking and it was hardly necessary to simulate sickness, but I contrived some very realistic foam, and fear lent artistry to what threatened to become a most effective fit. The

slave-girls were horrified. They knew all about jinns, and it was quite obvious that one or more of these evil spirits had taken possession of their guest. After my first gulps and splutters, they hardly looked at me, but, with amulets pressed to their eyes, and shrieking a medley of prayers, they stumbled blindly out of the door.

Fortunately Kamel Fahmi was attracted by the noise of the stampede and when I ran, choking, into the sunshine, I saw his face, which by this time had acquired a permanently anxious expression, peering round a forbidden doorway. Without asking any questions he hurried me to the distant rooms prepared for us and bolted the door, which looked as if only Aladdin could open it. The rest of that day was peace.

On the flat roof we breakfasted next morning—a curious meal consisting of figs, tarib (a junket made of sour goat's milk), marag (a sort of oily soup mixed with bits of fat), reddish-black doura bread, squashed dates which had come from Basrah by sea, very thick honey, with loucoums,<sup>1</sup> and water strongly flavoured with scent, for all the wells along the coast are brackish and unpleasant to taste, though apparently they have no bad effects on the system, except at the capital, Sabya, where the inhabitants suffer from swollen paunches.

While we were still eating, the murmur of voices gathered sufficient volume to attract my attention, and a cautious glance over the parapet revealed a group of horses and donkeys, with a large guard of soldiers, in the midst of a crowd which was momentarily swelling. The chief element consisted of pale, anæmic-looking men in futahs, striped purple and white, with little straw caps on their heads, which were shaven as clean as their faces, but there was a fair percentage of tribes-

<sup>1</sup> Turkish delight.

men of Beni Zeid, Beni Abs, the Ja'dah, and Beni Marwan, who had brought their flocks to market, and a picturesque contingent of hillmen of the famous Hashid tribe. These stalwart mountaineers, with sheep-skin coats gaping over chests bare but for their broad cartridge belts, were clear-skinned and bearded, with black, well-oiled hair under indigo turbans. They had come down from their hills—which are so steep that animals bought in the plains have to be carried up, as calves or lambs, and can never return—with Sheikh Ali Darhan, an ally of the Idrisi, whom I afterwards met in the house of Yehya Basahi, minister and rogue.

We descended to the street, where, to begin with, the crowd was quite good-humoured; but strangers were rare, and a habbara unknown, so they surged with undisguised amazement round the half-broken stallions provided for us to ride. The horses, maddened by the noise, bolted as soon as their heads were released, and the soldiers began beating back the people, who would have followed, with the butts of their rifles, thus turning good-natured chaff into angry abuse. Fortunately the crowd was so thick that the mass of humanity stopped the horses and, in a solid wedge, we swayed through the suqs amidst a riot of noise, smell and dust. The score of soldiers were unable to struggle with the throng, and, as more and more excited townsfolk swelled the mob and the ominous rumour drifted after us, "Are they Moslems?" changing to "By Allah, they are not of Islam," they got frightened and began hitting out wildly. Somebody was hurt, and the murmur of the crowd swelled to a roar. I never saw the soldiers again. They were submerged in a struggling mass, while Jusuf on his little white donkey was swept away by an eddy, impotent to resist, but shouting to me to follow.

The wide market square opened out ahead, with



great stacks of dom leaves to be sold for thatch and a dozen camels moving the clumsy pestles of the sem-sem mills. I could not turn, but, with the clamour of abuse behind me and the sound of shots beginning to be audible above the tumult, I was impelled still farther away from my vanished guard. No one with any authority was with us, for the sheikhs were particularly bigoted and had refused to ride with a woman. I could hardly retain my seat, balancing sideways on a pillow and vainly attempting to keep my face hidden, and, at the same time, protect my head from the sun-stroke which seemed imminent, for, through a single piece of silk, the Arabian sun has the force of a blow.

In this fashion I was swept along till, just outside the market, my horse stumbled and I slipped off among the half-naked throng. The soldiers, I was told afterwards, had formed up in a line and, kneeling, were attempting to stem the onslaught by hurling sand and stones, but my horse was sucked away in the human maelstrom, and, stumbling over unaccustomed draperies, blinded by my thick veil, I found myself powerless to resist the pressure. There were some unpleasant moments when all my Arabic left me, except a phrase which I kept repeating, and which I hoped meant, "There are many thousands like me in Egypt," and, after that, I have very little idea of what happened. There came a burst of firing, presumably into the air, and I found myself, breathless, crushed, exhausted, near an open door, which a stranger was doing his best to close as quickly as possible. The heavy wood stuck, and, with a supreme effort, I disengaged myself and almost fell across the threshold. Someone caught my arm and dragged me in, while an older man, grasping the situation with a promptitude unusual in the East, called to his slaves to put up the great emergency bars.



"Shut the door!" shouted everyone at once; but there was a moment of chaos while my rescuers fought the people on the threshold, dealing stout blows right and left. I was pushed up some stairs, while ominous crashes sounded below, amidst shouts and cries which in any other country would certainly have denoted a battle. Whispering women met me in the dimness and drew me on, up and up, till I found myself in the harem of Salim Ba Hassan, the Hadramauti, whose son was being married that day. Consequently, the crowd which surrounded me in the large upper room was wonderfully adorned.

There were a score of women and girls, ranging from three or four years old to sixty, but pre-eminent among them were Zahara and Ayesha, daughters of the house, and another Ayesha, sister of the merchant, for they were laden with gold jewellery in the shape of huge crescents, set with rubies, pearls, and sapphires, and their hair, rolled over great bundles of sweet-smelling herbs (chiefly berga-ush) was dyed a bright orange-pink, not red, with paste made of henna and marigolds. Leading me to the best divan, in a corner from where I could see the still-crowded square, a solid mass of faces all looking up at the house where I had taken refuge, they brought me most unpleasant syrups, diluted with rose-water, and sticky Turkish cakes, with which at the moment I was unable to cope. For the first time in a harem I saw the type which must have been the origin of the old Arab pictures—pale, oval face, heavy and smooth-skinned, slightly hanging full-lipped mouth, fine eyes, long and swollen lidded, but devoid of any expression except a certain vacant sensuality. Here, too, was the glossy black hair, high bosom, and the hips, "so heavy that they incommoded her walk," beloved of ancient poets. While waiting for the faithful Jusuf to come to my rescue, I talked

about Egypt and the feminist movement among her women.

"I was born in this room," said Zahara, reprov-  
ingly, "and I have never left it! Women should be  
taken care of and given all that they can desire, but  
of what use is freedom?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### RIOT AMONG THE DRUG-EATERS

WE left Midi early one morning and went by way of Wadi Heiran and a great stretch of pasture land, covered with tufts of alga grass, to Habl. This small desert town will always remain in my mind as a picture of patriarchal life, yet the owner of the one imposing red-brick dwelling, with its many different buildings enriched with ornamental plaster, arched loggias opening on to innumerable expanses of flat roof, began life as a slave in Medina. Rumour has it that he made his wealth in slave-trading and gun-running, but now his son has married the niece of the paramount sheikh of the Beni Abs, and the whole village depends on the patriarchal state of Sheikh Saeed, whose household numbers at least eighty women, children, armed retainers, servants, and slaves. Thus might a settled Abraham have lived, paternal and beneficent, the owner of vast flocks and herds, the father of many children, and the lord of the neighbourhood.

The ground floor is only used by servants, and in various corners huddle sheep, goats, and donkeys, while baggage-camels lie in the yards, and fowls run about the passages. Upstairs, we passed across flat roofs and open porches to a mighty reception chamber, where Indian water-pipes were brought us (for there is no strict Idrisi tarika in Yemen Habl) and five series of green tea, each differently flavoured. Sheepskins were flung across the divans, and a great array of weapons decorated the walls between rows of alcoves

filled with enamel bowls of every size and colour. I counted 195 on one wall alone, and certainly the others, with their scores of jars, saucepan-lids, dishes, and basins, would have supplied sufficient common crockery to stock a provincial shop.

Sheikh Saeed, a kindly, fatherly person of portly frame, with a fringe of grey hair round a face which crinkled cheerily as he smiled, refused to talk about the Beni Marwan politics, in which I was interested. "What do women know of fighting?" he said. "Come, ya Sitt, I will show you my family."

We went across sunlit roofs, followed by a colossal nanny-goat whose udders dragged on the ground, to a long room full of women in flaming orange and vermillion. "This is my wife," said the sheikh, indicating a plump matron who had borne her lord many children, ranging from twenty-four years to three weeks in age. The lady spoke an Arabic entirely beyond my comprehension, but she waved me to a divan while she went on kicking to and fro a hammock, slung under the seat on which she was sitting, which contained her last baby. The sheikh enthroned himself on a central couch, and all the women kissed his knees, to which he replied by a salute on the forehead for his wives, and a pat on the head for the slaves.

The women's dress consisted of a skirt wound round and round under an enormously wide-sleeved muslin garment not unlike a Syrian abba, with a headkerchief, a meliya like a sheet, and a little waistcoat which gaped open and showed heavy gold ornaments on smooth olive skins.

After an hour, in which we all sat quite still and there was no conversation of any sort, though I managed to sort out three wives and several daughters, one of whom was like an old Indian picture, the sheikh went out, and, instantly, there was a babel of conver-



sation. "She must be very old. Look at the gold in her teeth! I never saw anyone so thin. Show us what you are like, lady—this is harem; nobody will come in." Somebody pulled at my habbara. Another seized a stray wisp of hair. "She is not old. There is no white in her head, but what a funny colour." "In Egypt do you not paint your fingers, so?" And the speaker held out a hand which, but for the vermilion nails, looked as if it had been dipped in ink to the knuckles.

It was 88 degrees in the shade that day, but the women were cold, and glad of any excuse for huddling down beside small charcoal fires. I helped them to prepare our first ceremonial meal, a social affair in which many of the women from the villages were assisting. Great cauldrons of rice and mutton were being prepared somewhere in the back premises, but the ladies busied themselves in baking various kinds of bread and pastry on a conveniently shady roof. Maryam rolled out thin sheets of batter, soaked them in oil and handed them to Khadija, who twisted them deftly into three-cornered shapes for the little sherifa to fill with mincemeat. I am afraid the only part I took in the performance was to fan the fires, under the watchful gaze of the chief wife. At last the steaming pots were brought from below, and we all joined in ladling the food into rows of basins and arranging the bread and pastry round them.

The feast took place on a roof, from which there was a view of grey and gold plain, the shrub and sand merging at last with the purple of the great barrier range which is the beginning of Imam Yehya's country.

"We are all Bedouins here," said the sheikh, "so you must excuse simplicity," and he tore off a great hunk of flesh which he stuck into my mouth.

In the background a woman made coffee with a

row of broad-beaked pots on a special hearth, and now and again she threw a handful of incense on the charcoal, and the sweet smell drifted over our piled tray.

"Wallahi! It is cold," said the sheikh.

"In my country we have frost and snow," I answered, and remembered suddenly that I was an Egyptian.

"Strange thing! I did not know that Cairo was so cold. We have no frost here, except, I am told, in Kameran."

Always on the alert for geographical information, I asked, amazed: "But I thought the island was quite flat. Is there a high mountain?"

"No, no; but there is frost."

Desperately I tried to remember the latitude of Kameran. "Surely the climate cannot be so different," I protested.

"No, it is the same; but there are two Christians there."

Wondering how religion could have such a refrigerating effect on the atmosphere, I gazed blankly at my host.

"They make it in a machine," he said, surprised at my stupidity, and, only then, I remembered that the Arabic word for frost and ice is the same.

From Hahl we went down the wadi of the same name, between stretches of marigolds and incense bushes, with hemd (from which acid is extracted), tamarisk, and thorn trees, with the usual fields of millet and sem-sem. Most desolate country lay between us and the hills till we crossed Wadi Ain, the boundary between Asir and Yemen, and Wadi Baheis, neither of which could be recognized as landmarks at this dry season. The qubba of a wali showed white in the distance, and then we came to Loheia, which, after a

combined attack from sea and land during the war, presented a spectacle of desolation. The biggest hill is crowned by the shattered Ottoman barracks, and below it the once-walled city is a heap of fallen masonry and tottering houses. It appeared half deserted as we passed the fine mosque with its high madna and many-domed roof, so I was glad to leave it next morning for Ganda, in company with a delightful old roly-poly sheikh called Issa Ibrahim, without whose protection the excitable governor, Sherif Mohammed ibn Zeid, assured me my life would not be safe.

Thereafter we travelled slowly through the Has-habiri country, where the crops grow high above one's head, mixed with sweet-scented flowers, and the huts are oblong structures, reminiscent of English haystacks and often covered with a climbing plant like a giant convulvulus. We passed in succession El Orsh, with a stretch of dom palms, looking skinny and unkempt because all their leaves had been stripped for thatch; Deir el Bahri, a large village with camels wandering amidst groves of mimosa; Urruj, where this tree is even more plentiful, and there are many acres of cotton; and Ajlaneya, where the wide-spreading shade tempted us to lunch till we found the earth was full of thorns.

It is curious how not only the manner of life but the character of the people seems to change as one goes south from Asir to Yemen. The latter is a land of lotus-eaters, where everything moves slowly.

A day's journey is never more than ten or twelve miles at most, usually less. A village barely out of sight is "strange country—very far away." There is a much laxer standard of morality and, if possible, even more superstitions. Divorce is so common that I met one old man who obligingly counted up just over a hundred wives for my benefit.

Here the Azzan rings out almost unheeded, and

the wandering dervishes go from village to village asking alms in the name of the dead saint and sufi, Ahmed el Ouan, who is supposed to have given them a secret charm, which prevents the blood running in spite of the blows they deal themselves on matted hair and brows with axes and iron maces.

There are sweet-sellers in the streets with trays of brilliant stickiness; women, thickly veiled, with striped red and black garments under their indigo sheibas,<sup>1</sup> shuffle by on sandalled feet with a silver sheath on each toe. A glimpse of tall water-pipes of fretted silver with multi-coloured tubes may be seen in the straw shelters where the servants of great houses watch beside their masters' doors. In Hodeidah there are even Jews, perhaps fifty or sixty of them, pale, unhealthy-looking men, with long ringlets hanging from their skull-caps. They may not carry arms, or build a house of more than two stories, or wear anything except a single long, print garment like a nightshirt, leaving the legs bare; but they are not in the least ill-treated, and they are sometimes craftsmen of no mean order.

Shrines are regarded with a deference entirely at variance with the ordinances of the Ahmedia (Idrisi) tarika, and their guardians (mansab) are supposed to be able to work miracles by the aid of the holy dust they cherish. The most famous of these is at Marawa, where for 400 years the Faithful have visited the tomb of Ali ibn Omar el Ahdal, to whom is now added another "saint" of the same family, the Abdul Rahman el Ahdal, who received the first Idrisi in Yemen in 1836.

In the southern towns the sound of an audh<sup>2</sup> and the smell of incense drift out across shadowed

<sup>1</sup> Sheet-like outer garments called, "meliya" in Asir, "haik" in Morocco, "barracan" in the Sahara.

<sup>2</sup> Lute.





THE PARADISE OF THE KAT-EATER.



corners, and for four hours every noon there is a great stillness in which the world seems merged in sleep. If an unwitting stranger salutes a group half-seen through an open doorway, there is no answer to his "Salaam, aleikum." If a robber wished, he could enter any house in Yemen unobserved, but presumably the robber, too, is enjoying a paradise of kat.

*Cathula Edulis* is the name of the shrub which grows at an altitude of 4,000 feet, and whose leaves provide the mainspring of life to Bedouin and townsmen alike. Relays of swift female camels bring the precious green bundles to the towns, where eager crowds wait, restless-eyed and irritable, for its arrival. The rich man spends up to £1 a day on the tenderest shoots, and the beggar in the by-way cries, not for alms, but for a few leaves of kat. "Là karem illa karem el kat" (there is no generosity but the generosity of kat), he reiterates as he stretches skinny hands for his prize, and sticks the twigs, one by one, under his turban. There are special houses where men lie for hours on divans, a shee-sha,<sup>1</sup> a glass of water, and a fresh green bundle beside them. Every window is shut, the atmosphere is intolerable, and the silence as of death.

I once saw a kat riot, and it was as if a criminal asylum had been emptied of its inmates. The supply from the mountains had not arrived, and the whole population of the town had drifted into the square, great men and merchants with staring eyes and foam dribbling from their lips, while the lesser folk cried and howled with animal incoherence. Some wretched middlemen were suspected of tampering with the regular service in order to increase their profits, and the crowd turned on them like hounds after a fox. One just disappeared, torn and trampled out of human

<sup>1</sup> Water-pipe.

shape. The other was rescued by the police, who in their turn were attacked, and the mass of maddened humanity surged up to the mamuria,<sup>1</sup> where a babel of voices yelled for vengeance. "Put him in prison, honoured Mamur!" "He would kill us! He would torture us!" "He has stopped our kat. We cannot live!" "Give the dog to us!" and so on, till there came a rumour that a trotting camel had been seen in the distance, and the whole crowd turned and ran, ashraf<sup>2</sup> with silk robes and gold daggers, their turbans awry and sweat pouring down their faces, poor men with their clothes streaming out unheeded, the swollen-muscled carriers forcing a way with brutal indifference to the cries of weedy merchants, yellow of skin as of garments.

I went down to the suq with the last stragglers to see the distribution, but I could not get near enough to the booth—beside which an over-ridden camel was rolling, apparently in its death throes—to see more than what looked like a very determined battle. Suddenly the crowd parted and an unrecognizable figure tottered past me. "Allah is great! Blessed be Allah!" it gasped, clutching a bunch of crumpled leaves to its garments, blood-stained and torn, where a great gash showed across the chest. Reeling, stumbling, it brought up at last against a wall. "Allah is generous," came whispering across dry lips as its clutching fingers closed on space and the leaves fell unheeded at its feet. It was the Imam of the mosque.

Kat contains the stimulating properties of strong caffeine. While it is being eaten, it gives a sense of slothful ease and well-being. Later it excites the brain and stimulates mental and physical activity, so that he who would travel fast starts after the "Asr"<sup>3</sup> prayers,

<sup>1</sup> Seat of local government.

<sup>2</sup> Plural of sherif, descendants of the Prophet, a religious title.

<sup>3</sup> Afternoon.



for the kat-eater cannot sleep, and till ten o'clock or midnight he is full of restless energy. Then the reaction comes, when, depressed and nervous, he tosses from side to side, with the result that he will not rise early, and so no work of any sort can be done till the sun is high. Thus the life of Yemen depends entirely on this mountain shrub. I believe permanent indulgence weakens the heart and shortens the duration of life as surely as it ruins the teeth, which become brown and decayed. However, the birth-rate in the Idrisi realm is high, each woman averaging six to eight children, though of these more than half die within the first year, partly because of the insanitary conditions under which they live, and partly because the girls are mothers at thirteen or fourteen.

I tried eating kat myself on one occasion when I had been invited to a lunch-party in a merchant's harem. The invitation was from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m., and, when I reached the house, I found thirty-one women in a room, perhaps fourteen feet square, taking turns in smoking a row of monumental water-pipes which stood on a long stool between the divans. The younger wore long tight-fitting dresses of bright silks embroidered in gold or silver, with immense necklaces of gold Turkish five-pound pieces and plastrons of fretted gold-work. Nose-studs, anklets, quantities of ear-rings, and bracelets so heavy that they wore grooves in the flesh, completed their jewellery. After the age of child-bearing is past it is not etiquette to wear silk, so the older ladies were simply garbed in one-piece overalls of print, with head-dresses not unlike mob-caps.

Nearly all the women had the most beautiful feet, slender, arched, and of perfect shape. There was an elderly Circassian with hay-coloured hair, blue eyes, and a high-bridged nose, which, with her rosy skin, made

her look like an English village woman. The others were chiefly small and slight, of scarcely more than a child's stature, sallow and olive, without any of the distinction of the Bedouin women and without their admirable features.

For three hours we sat in comparative silence, eating melon seeds and listening to a girl who sang Turkish songs to the accompaniment of an audh, while the atmosphere grew thick with smoke and the fumes of incense from little braziers, which slaves put under our veils and skirts, that the scent might drift through them.

Then we went into another room, where lunch was served on a long stool about eight inches high. Sitting on bolsters on either side of this, we partook of sheep and chickens, roasted whole and stuffed with rice, almonds, raisins and spice, with bowls of differently flavoured pastes, and messes of vegetables cooked in oil. We ate with our fingers, and very soon I felt in need of a bath, for I was apparently the guest of honour, so all the women tried to stick large and dripping tit-bits into my mouth, with disastrous result for my best magenta-coloured silk. We were given nothing to drink till, having washed our hands and mouths in an inlaid silver basin held by a slave at the doorway, we trooped back into the first apartment and ranged ourselves on the carpet-covered couches. Then green tea and coffee came, but the latter was the nauseous beverage made of husks to which I have already referred.

While I was still wondering how I could get rid of it, two brides came in, and the gorgeousness of their garments distracted my attention. They wore long coats of gold brocade, buttoning with a row of little gilt bells and opening over magenta satin petticoats weighted with bullion embroidery. On their

heads were scarves of gold-embroidered muslin, folded so that the metal-work edges formed long lapels over each ear and a band across the forehead, and each carried a vermilion silk handkerchief edged with gold, about the size of a small tablecloth. This costume is worn on state occasions for two years after marriage, or until the first child is born.

For half an hour conversation became animated on the subject of the Emir's iniquitous decision with regard to dowries. In an effort to reduce life to the essential simplicity enjoined by his tarika, he had fixed such bridal gifts at a maximum of 50 dollars. Nine of these cumbersome Maria Thérèse coins make up the English pound, and the usual figure for a dowry among rich merchants is 3,000 dollars, so the annoyance of the women can be imagined. "How can we buy clothes and jewellery, carpets and bedding, with such a sum?" they demanded, and I think the party would have turned into an indignation meeting but for the arrival of the kat.

A bunch of very small juicy leaves was given to each guest, and there were delighted murmurs of, "This is generosity of Allah!" before all settled themselves to chew the inviting delicacy. Silence fell. One by one the shee-sha stems slipped from listless fingers. Heavy eyelids drooped and when, having acquired a sore throat, and a violent headache, I asked how soon the stimulating effect would begin, there was no answer.

The taste of the leaf is bitter, and the juice irritates the throat of the neophyte, giving him an intolerable thirst. For my own part, except that I did not sleep for three nights, and felt as if I had been drugged the following day, I found the elixir of Yemen had little effect. I was told, however, that I had eaten too much for a first attempt.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE QUALITY OF BEAUTY

**M**Y Yemen journey ended at Hodeidah, a small native port on the Red Sea, north of Aden. There I had to wait for a Khedivial steamer to stop a mile or so away in the bay, while dhows fought their way out across the breakers, like water-logged spiders, to hurl drenched and terrified passengers from the crest of a convenient wave on to her deck. Fortunately, I was able to rent the harem portion of a merchant's house, from whose flat roof at sunset there was a marvellous view of wind-whipped sand and sea. For weeks I hardly moved out of one immense white-washed room, furnished with a rope mattress, a chair and a table; and every evening, when the hours devoted to chewing kat were over, I was visited by stern-lipped sheikhs or weedy townsmen who wanted to know what manner of lunatic I was, for, of course, "all women who had no men to look after them must necessarily be lacking in sense."

I had to buy a long-stemmed water-pipe, and while I sat stiffly on the chair whose fourth leg was splinted and bound with scarlet cord, self-conscious because of the crumpled European clothes to which I had returned, the procession of the curious wandered in to crouch on the vivid carpets and take turns at smoking.

After the first week I had made friends with the few who could understand my Arabic, and from these I heard strange tales of a land which is still beyond the



ken of travellers. In exchange I told of English customs, which by force of environment began to seem to me as outlandish as they did to my amazed and incredulous audience.

"It is not decent that a man should be seen in the street with his women," said the quadi with such emphatic dignity that I squirmed.

"What charm can a woman have unveiled?" asked a merchant. "When there is no mystery, where is attraction?"

I remembered a somewhat similar conversation in the presence of Nouri Sha-alan, hereditary chief of the Ruwalla, who, according to legend, can put ten thousand horsemen in the saddle and arm them with modern rifles. It happened in the Dead Sea Valley, within the great camp of Abdullah, Emir of Transjordan.

Ibn Saoud of Nejd was leading the fanatical Wahabi hordes to attack the borders of the more civilized northern states. The chieftain of Ruwalla, who had sat comfortably on the fence during the great war, while his son fought for the Allies and his nephew for Turkey, saw himself crushed between two forces. He feared the vengeance of Ibn Saoud for a hundred successful raids, so he chose the lesser of two evils and came as fast as his Arab stallions would carry him to make his peace with Abdullah, whose house he had twice betrayed.

It was a memorable meeting. I was a guest in the Emir's camp, and I was present at the feast given by this second son of Hussein, then King of the Hedjaz, for his erstwhile enemy. We sat in a great pavilion carpeted with rugs from Bokhara and Shiraz. On two sides the flaps were raised, so that we looked across the scattered tents and rows of tethered horses to the river and the blue hills of Moab. The walls

were hung with rifles, embroidered saddlecloths and swords in tasselled scabbards. Below this armoury were ranged "maktans" of piled sheepskin rugs with silver-pointed camel-saddles to lean against.

The Emir is a Bedouin at heart, and he cannot sleep unless, through the opening of his tent, he can see the stars and smell the fragrance of the desert wind. We sat in a circle on the floor round a fringed leather mat, and slaves brought in great brass trays piled with sheep, chickens, bread and rice. We ate with our fingers, silently, and occasionally, as I sat on Abdullah's right, he tore some specially succulent morsel from a carcass and added it to the piled flesh before me.

"Man must eat to fight, and woman that she may be pleasant in his sight," he teased me.

The slaves ranged themselves behind us—ebony figures in brightest orange, emerald and rose colour, with gold-hilted daggers in their belts. In gorgeousness of attire they formed a contrast to the great Bedouin lords, whose word meant life or death to thousands. These men wore plain robes of dark camel's hair, with red cotton kufiyas wound over their heads. Only Abdullah showed a gleam of silk below his burnous, and, as a Prince of Mecca, his sword was encrusted with gems. The sound of bugles or a stallion's neigh drifted into the tent where men fenced with words, and thoughts were so keen that they seemed like tangible weapons.

Suddenly Abdullah turned to me. "This is no time for politics," he said. "When a man has eaten, his mind is at rest." I took the hint.

"Tell me how you liked London," I suggested, for the Emir had just returned from a three months' stay in our capital, where he treated successfully with the English Government for the independence of Trans-jordan.

"By Allah!" he answered, "you are so much in a hurry you have no time to think."

I asked what had most impressed him in London, and he twinkled at me cheerfully and pretended to be immersed in deep reflection. The result was surprising, for he assured me, still smiling, that the three things which had struck him most were the mannequins at a dress parade, Lord Curzon's manners, and the supernatural intelligence of the lift man, who always knew whether he wished to go upstairs or down.

"What did you think of European women?" I asked.

Nouri Sha-alan was shocked. Surely, never in all history had such a subject been discussed in the tents of a Sherif of Mecca. But Abdullah was possessed by an imp of mischief—perhaps it was relief at the postponement of his discussion with Nouri, for, to an Arab, discourtesy is worse than a lie, and it would be difficult to talk of the Ruwalla policy without either one or the other.

"By Allah, your women have no charm," announced the Emir. "There is no mystery about them. They look a man in the eyes and he can read what is in their minds at once."

A good-looking young sheikh, Ali, son of Hussein of the Sherifian house, entered the tent. He had just been released from a year's imprisonment by his relative, the King of the Hedjaz, but he looked as if he came from the perfumed chamber of his bride. His hair was plaited in glossy braids, his polished nails were hennaed, his silk robes opened over a long-sleeved garment of spotless white.

"Why talk of women, Sidi?" he asked. "There is but one thing worth speech, and that is war."

I learned that this young exquisite was the leader

of Feisul's irregular cavalry, upon whose reckless head the Turks had put the largest price offered during the war.

Abdullah would not be turned from his subject. "How can a woman look after her man if she is always in the streets? A warrior must have peace when he returns to his home."

I spoke of the freedom accorded to Western girls. "But our women are free," protested the Emir.

"They cannot go out of the house without your permission."

Abdullah's smile was malicious. "When a woman goes on a journey it is because a man opens the door for her."

I acknowledged the hit, and suggested that Islam would have to modify its prejudices concerning intercourse between the sexes. Suddenly the spirit of the conversation changed.

"By Allah, no man shall look upon my sister in my house!" exclaimed the Emir, thumping his knee.

"I would die twenty deaths before a woman of my race should talk with a stranger," cried Ali of the slender hands. The men stared at me, flushed and indignant.

There was a tinkle of silver anklets. A woman passed the tent doors, her indigo drapery held closely across her face. The eyes of the Arabs dropped in homage, and I realized that it is pride, not humility, which veils the Eastern woman.

That same winter I was camping in the Emir's country with the famous Arabian traveller, St. John Philby, then Resident of Transjordan, and his wife.

"I will send with you Ali ibn Hussein, so that you may see daily what beauty is like," remarked Abdullah.

The young warrior was attached to our party, but, when not fighting, he liked to travel in comfort. A





“WHEN A WOMAN GOES ON A JOURNEY, IT IS BECAUSE A MAN OPENS THE DOOR FOR HER.” (*Arab Proverb*)



roofless temple at Petra seemed to him inadequate shelter, and he used to prowl round the camp collecting everyone's blankets for his own use. Even this ill-gotten warmth did not satisfy him. Wistfully, he gazed at my stretcher-bed pitched against a crumbling Roman wall, and the fleabags in which the Philbys braved wind and rain.

"Wallahi," he mourned, "here am I cold in one corner, and there are you and Mr. Thomas cold in two others. Only Mr. and Mrs. Philby are warm. Truly, marriage is more satisfying than blankets."

Ali ibn Hussein approved of Dora Philby's Titian-red locks. "They are nearly as beautiful as henna," he said when sunrise flamed over the "rose-red city half as old as time," and took some trouble to procure for her a packet of the fresh green leaves with which Arab women would have turned such tawny-tiger-lily loveliness into a fierce metallic red. About my shingle he was too horrified to be reticent. "It is a shame," he murmured. "Why has Allah cursed you in this fashion? Hide your head or you will never get a husband."

In Arabia they have no use for charm unadorned, and in order to prove the superiority of local beauty over anything English I had described, the Yemen merchant who, like Abdullah of Transjordan, believed in mystery—"for how can a man love when there is nothing left for him to discover?"—took me to his harem to assist at the bridal toilette of his youngest daughter.

The girl sat mute in a corner while relatives and slaves fussed around her. First her fringe and the top of her head were dyed bright pink with a paste made of marigolds and sweet herbs. Her back hair was left dark and twisted into plaits soaked with oil. Then every other hair on her body was removed with

a most powerful depilatory, and where her eyebrows had been, long fine lines, like butterflies' antennæ, were painted across her brows. Her nostrils and the insides of her ears were reddened with a pointed stick dipped in henna. Her fingers, which for days had been bound at the tips—a more effective and more enduring method than the metal clips of Paris—were coloured orange, like the palms of her hands. The wrists and the knuckles were decorated with a sort of Batyk work to resemble a dark lacy mitten, her toes were steeped in scented scarlet, and kohl was used to accentuate the three necklaces of Venus on her throat. The same blue kohl was employed for her eyes—but inside the lids, between eyelashes and eyeball, so that the irritation it caused produced a liquid swimming effect.

“Wallahi! She is beautiful!” murmured the hand-maidens, sitting back on their heels to regard this work of art.

Only the pale skin, very smooth and dusky olive, remained unmarred, and the slight immature figure, for the bride was only thirteen. With a shadow of her future dignity and the bonelessness of a cat, she rose, and the slave girls brought a marvellous robe of stiff golden brocade, buttoned from throat to ankle with little round balls. The sleeves were narrow and tight-fitting, almost hidden by the heavy bracelets. Rows of gold necklaces covered her unformed bosom and a cap of stiff metal embroidery concealed most of her pink hair. She carried a handkerchief of magenta silk, the size of a small tablecloth, the hem of her dress was sewn with bells, and she wore primrose leather Russian boots. Her sisters regarded her with enchanted eyes. “She is lovely,” they said, “but so thin!”

Here is the source of all feminine worry in the East. Each maiden knows that to attain that perfection of beauty symbolized by many curves, she must gorge.



Really there is no other word that expresses it. Beauty in primitive Arabia is as much a question of food as it is in America. The cream is skimmed from the camel's milk for the marriageable daughters. The fattest dates, those melting stoneless slobes of amber and honey, are set aside for them. They must not walk or think or worry on the way to their goal of fat, which is synonymous with marriage.

On several occasions, while travelling in the deserts, disguised as a native woman—I always claimed that my grandmother was a Circassian slave in the harem of the Bey of Tunis, to account for my grey eyes and to give me the glamour of social position—sheiks have contemplated adding me to their household. The conversation with my headman, or caravan leader, has generally run like this: "Her eyes are like sunshine flashing on swords drawn in battle, but she is thin as my two fingers."

"There is food to spare in the house of my lord," my retainer would reply politely.

"Thanks be to Allah, but much time will be spent on the fattening."

"There are no hours in the desert."

"It will cost much to feed her. By Allah, I cannot give more than three camels for one so starved."

An old, a very old sheikh of the Syrian Metouelis offered me a whole tribe if I would wed him, but with the proviso: "You must sit still for three months to get fat."

During my most unsuccessful attempt to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, I made friends with a Bedouin family, and the old father, having tasted my egg-and-spice speciality, fell in love with me.

"You shall marry my son," he said. "I like Circassian women and I have always wanted the boy to wed a good cook, but—" he regarded me doubt-

fully, "he must not see you, for, being young, he dreams of beauty." His gesture was expressive of many curves, each one vaster than the last.

I believe King Khama of Bechuanaland considered that the wife of the Governor—who, alas! had to go sideways through any ordinary doorway—was the only white woman in Rhodesia "worth cows."

"Her hips are so heavy that she sways between them like a flower. Her chin is a ball, cupped in butter," sings an early Arab poet of his beloved.

Always when I stay for any length of time in a harem, kindly women, distressed at my resemblance to an anatomical specimen, offer me a thick evil-smelling paste, which they insist will make me resemble the full moon. One girl naïvely assured me that I looked like an "undressed snake," and I could not convince her that this was our ambition in the West. "Cover yourself," she said, "for, often, a man is deceived by many clothes."

Whenever an enterprising advertiser wishes to sell New York or London yet another specific guaranteed to remove all ills to which age is heir, he announces that it is a product of the East, bought for untold gold from a harem or a fakir. But the East has no secrets. Its make-up is as desperate as a Cubist picture.

Burma was the first to use liquid powder, and it splashes it thick as mortar. Mud masks have long been familiar to the dancers of Cambodia, and I have seen them sitting by the river banks, twisting their pliable hands, finger-tip to back of wrist, while their faces harden under green clay. The Japanese lady, or the high priestess of those ceremonial temple teas, where no amount of muscle or goodwill can digest the cakes, no self-control disguise the nauseous soapiness of the beverage, will sit for hours, each hand in a bowl of olive oil.

The women of Asir spend as much time polishing their nails to a shining ebony, produced by the stain of a certain berry, as we do with orange sticks and cuticle remover. But there are no secret creams and essences.

I have seen poultices of wet leaves used in Syria for the same purpose as strips of raw veal, strongly scented, in the most discreet parlours of Paris . . . and, alas! with as little effect. In fact, all over the world, women think the same thoughts and want the same things. It is possible that the thoughts are tintured by climate or culture, but the "want" is universal.

When food has been scarce, I have bought many a chicken, many a basket of eggs, for soap—that magic soap with which natives have seen me washing off the accumulated dirt of waterless days and been convinced that they could get rid of their black skins as easily.

Those precious scents with names like Arabian Nights' dreams have no more link with the East than the labels on our most exotic cults. The Arab woman uses very little scent, and the only kind she likes is a thick musky oil, which leaves a palpable stain. It is the men who buy the long thin flasks, like pencils stained with gold, and the most unexpected old sheikh, grave as Abraham, will pull one of these from its habitual place in his belt to sprinkle a few drops on the garment of a departing guest. Scented cigarettes are made for the West and for those dwellers between two worlds who live uncertainly in the tourist ports; but much scent is used in Eastern drinks. Tea and coffee may both be so perfumed that the guest will catch his breath, and, on her wedding day, a bride is so scented that every stranger can recognize her status as she passes.

An old wise woman in Arabia, of whom I inquired

concerning the beauty methods of her countrywomen, replied: "Sayeda, we have no need of secrets, for we ourselves are secret."

Here is the depth of their wisdom. What we reveal they conceal, and everyone but Eve and Aphrodite, specialists in failure, knows that a grain of mystery is worth a ton of thinning salts and all the pigments in the world.



## CHAPTER XV

### AN EYE FOR AN EYE

THERE was one subject which never failed us during the long hot evenings in Hodeidah, when the moon slipped into the sea like a fire-balloon and the dark-bearded townsmen spread their mats on the roof. The only sound was the mutter of prayer from the mosque, or the shuffle of a desert-bound caravan. To this accompaniment, the qadi who was also a theologian and a philosopher, spoke of Justice. I forget how many thousand books he had read on the subject, but he could quote for hours without stopping and nobody else knew enough to interrupt him.

If my Arabic had been sufficiently fluent, I would have suggested that justice, like morals, is a question of latitude. In the West we send a thief to ten years' penal servitude. In the East they cut off his hand. Personally, I should prefer the latter punishment. It hurts more, but not for so long. If the object of our justice is preventive, I'm not sure that we are on the right track.

In prison the thief is as soon forgotten as he would be in his grave. When he comes out there is nothing to warn us of his habits, but the one-armed Eastern is effectively branded as a robber. He can never get away with it twice.

The greatest modern law-giver of Africa was the Sherif Raisuli, brigand, warrior, politician, philosopher and Sultan of the Moroccan mountains.

At one period of his stormy career he was Governor of Tangier. For the first time in history, produce could be left all night in the markets without a guard. Merchants could ride, with money-filled saddle-bags, the length and breadth of the province.

Raisuli's method of justice was simple. He held court in the open outside his palace door. A black slave stood on each side of him, one with an axe, the other with a tub of boiling oil or pitch. When a thie was condemned, the first slave lopped off wrist or ankle with a single blow. The second plunged the stump into the liquid, which was intended, not to torture, for the shock of the cut had momentarily numbed all feeling, but to close the arteries.

I have often heard Raisuli accused of severity, but never of injustice. He had no faith in the prison system and he expressed his objection as follows: "A man's absence is very soon forgotten. The presence of his head on the gate is a very urgent reminder!"

Unfortunately for the peace of Tangier, the Europeans objected to their morning rides being punctuated by decapitated heads, so they complained to the Sultan at Fez. Raisuli was recalled, but later, he established a more or less independent state, first on the coast, then in the mountains.

Amazing stories are told of his "justice." Once he buried a sherif in a sunken cornpit, and allowed him just enough oil and millet to live on till, after some months, finding the wretched man was still alive, he released him with the remark: "It is obvious that Allah does not mean you to die."

It is told how Musa Ben Hamed, an enemy who had committed the worst atrocities, was captured by Raisuli's men. He escaped from them and took refuge in the brigand's own house, claiming, not only right of sanctuary, but the privileges of a guest. For days he

was duly fed and sheltered; but each night, while he slept, a slave crept in and placed beside him the decapitated head of a son or brother.

Musa Ben Hamed took the hint at last, when the holocaust of his family was almost complete; but he was allowed to go free. "For," said Raisuli, "how could I fire on a man who had been my guest?"

At one time Raisuli incurred the wrath of the Sultan, his so-called master. Betrayed by a traitor, he was immured for four years in the dungeons at Mogador. These are below ground level, like the cells in the Doge's Palace at Venice. No light and but little air penetrate to them.

Raisuli and three other men were fettered by means of heavy iron collars to the same chain, whose ends were riveted to opposite walls. The prisoners were just too far away to touch each other. For weight of metal, they could hardly move. One of them died in his chains and the guards refused to remove his body for fear the governor should say he had escaped. Eventually it was eaten by rats, who grew so bold that they gnawed at the living prisoners, too weak to drive them away.

I asked Raisuli how he endured such misery. He answered:

"The world is as wide as a man's imagination. After all," he continued, "what has your civilization done? It has given you security and taken away hope."

Here is the rock-bottom of the Eastern point of view. They don't want security. They don't want what we call justice. They always feel, "What has been once, may be again!"

Look at Persia to-day. The present Shah, Reza Khan, began life as a stableboy.

I know a delightful pasha in Africa, whom I visit,

alternately, in an Arabian Nights' palace, and in a prison.

The Eastern is still heir to the Middle Ages, when a man was grand vizier one week and a beggar the next. The same uncertainty, and, consequently, the same hope, exists to-day. Prison is no serious consideration because, at any moment, the doors may be opened.

The horror of English justice to the Eastern would be its certainty, its inevitability. He could not conceive greater cruelty than a definite sentence, three years, five years, or ten years. There would be nothing left for which to hope. He prefers to be thrown into a dungeon pending his pasha's pleasure.

After all, the great man may marry a new wife, or receive good news, or be presented with a newly-born son. On any such joyful occasion he would certainly release his prisoners. So the captive is contented in his cell. His freedom is in the hands of Allah.

The actual law of Islam, as practised in the civilized East, Egypt, Algiers, and so on, is the most complicated code in the world. Our own law-books are child's play to the intricate Sheria system. It is divided into four codes, the Shafi, Hanbali, Hanafi and Maleki. Each one is the sole study of countless colleges. A thousand thousand books have been written on this favourite science of the East. During the last century, one author alone contributed a hundred and three volumes of interpretation and comment on a single code. His nephew added another sixty-one.

All this wisdom, which has filled libraries larger than the public buildings of London and Edinburgh, is based on the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, who must have been a very verbose man. In fact, with all respect, he can never have ceased talking, day or night, from the second he was born,



till long after he was buried, if a tithe of what is attributed to him is true.

Outside the more civilized centres of Islam, traditional law holds sway, and this is interpreted more or less according to the mentality of the judge. There is a delicious story about a famous qadi of Arabia, when burglary was still an art and respected as such. One day a thief hobbled into court.

"My Lord Qadi," he cried. "Where is this justice, for which you are so famous? Yesterday I was occupied in my honourable profession of robbing. The window-ledge broke under me, and see, I am lame from the result of my fall."

"Truly, that is iniquitous," retorted the judge. "Bring here the householder." But the householder protested it was not his fault. He had ordered a carpenter to mend the sill many days ago.

"Certainly it is the carpenter who is guilty," agreed the judge. "Bring him here." But the carpenter insisted he was not to blame. He had seen a very beautiful woman passing in a marvellous blue robe, and he had interrupted his work to follow her.

"Fetch me the woman," ordered the judge grimly. But the girl pleaded: "My Lord Qadi: my beauty is God-given, and you cannot bring the Almighty to judgment, and it is the dyer who is responsible for this exquisite robe of mine."

"Correct," nodded the judge. "At last we have got to the bottom of the matter. It is the dyer who must be punished for the thief's misfortune."

Now the dyer was an honest man. He gloried in his art. He took full responsibility for the beautiful bit of work which had attracted the carpenter's attention.

"Take him away and hang him in the doorway of the house where the accident occurred," ordered the judge, "for thus will justice be vindicated."

Half an hour later, an angry crowd, led by the lame robber, poured into the court.

"There is no justice in this country," they shrieked. "The doorway is too short. We cannot hang the dyer."

"How dare you say there is no justice?" thundered the qadi. "Fools that you are. Find a smaller dyer and hang him!"

The interruption of "causation," or legal responsibility, has always been a thorn in the side of justice. There was a famous case in England but little less ridiculous than the Arab skit quoted.

A cow found the gate of her pasture open, so she wandered down the road. After a while she saw a gap in the hedge, walked through it on to a lawn, and began eating everything green she could find. The grass happened to have been treated with a certain chemical, so the cow died.

Who was responsible; the farmer who had not locked the gate, the careless wayfarer who left it open, the hedger who had not mended the fence, or the householder who had used chemicals on his lawn? A further complication was added by the latter insisting that the chemist, or horticulturist, had supplied the wrong dressing, and that the one he had ordered was harmless.

That case was fought through every court in England. It went to the House of Lords before judgment was given against the chemist, and a very prickly precedent established.

Eastern justice is based on the principle, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." The robber loses a limb. The murderer or any accessory loses his head. Unfaithful women are stoned to death or buried alive. In Turkestan and some parts of Persia, brigands are baked in clay and left to cool into mud pillars, which

may serve as a warning to other highwaymen. The infidel is apt to have his eyes and tongue gouged out, in strict interpretation of the law: "The eye of the unbeliever is forfeit, likewise the tongue of him who bears false witness."

In the extremely ascetic Moslem sects, such as the Senussi in North Africa, for even smelling of smoke a man may lose his right hand. For drinking "leghbi," a mild intoxicant made from the juice of palms, he is flogged. For wearing jewellery, or any gold embroidery, for missing one of the day's five prayers; in fact, for any breach of the strictest Puritan code, the punishment would be as severe.

Women who betray their masters and, according to the actual letter of the law, a woman who strikes her husband, or a son who attacks his father, are condemned to slow strangulation.

For the death penalty, a woman must be brought before a judge, and, in case of infidelity, only direct evidence is admitted. No circumstantial evidence of any kind is accepted. Legally, a Moslem woman can always appeal to be tried before the local qadi, but, by custom, her punishment is generally left in the hands of her husband.

I imagine it is never severe, for the Prophet Mohammed insisted so often, "Treat your wives well if ye would win Paradise"; that, in practice, Moslem women can do almost anything they like except sacrifice their chastity.

In many African towns the women have a secret language of their own, handed down from mother to daughter, which no man can understand. This fact has to be admitted as evidence even in the most civilized Egyptian court. Two women, knowing how a crime was committed, can discuss it in detail in full hearing of their brother. He can plead:

"It was women's talk. I could not understand it," and the judge must accept his statement.

Bedouin law is particularly interesting, because, in the absence of direct evidence, it resorts to "the Oath" which has been handed down among the nomads from the days of Exodus: "If a man deliver unto his neighbour . . . any beast to keep, and it die . . . no man seeing it, then shall the oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it [the beast] shall accept and he [the defendant] shall not make good."

Generally it is the defendant who swears the oath and, in case of murder, where the stake is a large sum of blood-money, for which the tribe of the murderer is responsible, the plaintiff, or his tribe, has the right to dictate the form of the oath, the place where it shall be sworn, and the men who must back the word of their kinsman.

Each tribe acknowledges complete responsibility for the actions of its meanest member, so the occasion is a solemn one. Sometimes as many as fifty men are selected by name to swear to the innocence of the accused and, as the plaintiff naturally chooses those sheikhs and headmen whose honour is known, and takes full advantage of local superstition with regard to the site of the oath, the danger of perjury is negligible. No Bedouin is likely to swear falsely on the tomb of his tribal saint, for fear the spirit of the outraged dead should haunt him, in which case, of course, his camels would die, his goats be sterile, and his wife give birth to daughters.

If there are only thirty-two men in a tribe, and the seriousness of the crime demands an oath sworn by fifty-five, which, I believe, is the highest permissible number, twenty-three would have to repeat the oath a second time.



Permission to demand the "judgment by Oath" has to be granted by a Bedouin court consisting of the sheikhs of both tribes, and, if either the defendant or any one of those chosen by the plaintiff to back his word, refuses to swear—which very often occurs in small cases where the prisoner is bluffing—judgment is given in favour of the accusing tribe. In the desert, blood-money is generally divided between the family of the victim and the section which has lost a fighting man.

All over the world, from Mongolia to Abyssinia, from Morocco to Siam, I have attended native courts of justice, and my opinion is that the proportion of cases dismissed in the East is very much larger than such proportion in the West. On the other hand, the sentences are, what we should call, heavier.

In France a man is guilty until the jury has found him innocent. In England a man is innocent until the jury has pronounced him guilty. A subtle difference, but always the prisoner is up against twelve men, or perhaps more. A dozen different human beings, each with their own problems, theories and complexes, each with an entirely different point of view, have to be convinced of the accused's innocence. The advantages of a jury are evident; but, if I were fighting for my life, I would rather have to convince one unbiassed expert than twelve preoccupied amateurs.

Our justice is based on a presumption that a man's life is his most valuable possession and that he will sacrifice anything to preserve it. The East is wiser. It considers life of very little importance, a trifle compared with such things as religion, honour, the continuation of the race, or even money.

Raisuli told me how a rival brigand had once robbed him of jewels and gold. The thief was captured before he could do more than hide his spoils in some corner of the family land.

"Tell me where I shall find my property and you shall go free," said Raisuli; but the man would not even answer. He spoke no word through the flogging which followed, ignored the repeated offer of "Your life and liberty for my jewels," and died under the lash, still without saying a word.

When I first visited China, it was quite easy to hire a substitute for execution. Any poor coolie would accept one hundred dollars to ensure his family's support more adequately than his labour could do, and take some richer man's place in the condemned line.

To the West, death is a closed door; to the East, an open one. An American told me recently that, when he was in China on an official mission, he and his colleagues were entertained by a delightful little mandarin, who was always cheerful and considerate. He had a remarkable insight into European politics, which he discussed enthusiastically and at length. His smile was as persistent as his jokes, yet he was under sentence of death. His execution was carried out the day after the American mission left.

In a certain Arabian state, an official was exceedingly kind in helping me organize a caravan. One day I asked his wife if her lord could accompany me to the market to choose some new water-skins.

"He is to be hanged to-morrow," she said, "by the Emir's order, but his brother will go with you."

A year or so ago I was passing through Syria. I stopped to drink mint tea with an old friend, wife of a patriot, or revolutionary—the terms are synonymous in the East. It just depends which side you are on.

"How is the master?" I queried politely, over my third scented glass.

"The French killed him last week," my hostess answered unmoved. I gasped horror and protest.

"He leaves five sons," she reassured me, surprised at my emotion.

An Arabian court would condemn men to death for reasons that we should consider trifling, but it would not dream of accepting such evidence as satisfies us.

In any important case the testimony of two eye-witnesses is necessary, and these may be tested in a most unpleasant manner. The local Imam heats a long, thin strip of metal in a brazier and lays it, white-hot, on the tongue of the witness.

I have seen this test justify its existence, for the metal only rests on the tongue for the fraction of a second. The truthful man is not afraid, and the saliva in his mouth saves him from a burn. The false witness is terrified, and his mouth goes so dry that the first touch scalds his tongue.

In cases of murder no member of a family may testify against another, but only blood connexion counts. Husband and wife are not considered as relations, though, in one state at least, such an affinity is acknowledged between god-parents and god-children that even they may not testify against each other.

Death, which leaves the body whole, so that the spirit may go straight to Paradise, has no terrors. Decapitation is quite a different thing. A headless man would be branded as a murderer in the next world. Consequently prodigious efforts are made by the families of such victims to secure the heads and bury them with the bodies. Fortunes must have been spent in bribes to jailers and executioners, so that the head of a Jew or an infidel might decorate the gatepost, rather than that of the condemned Moslem.

The Kaid el Meshwar el Menebbhe told me of a fight in Africa when his men had been successful and could decorate their fence with a goodly number of enemy heads.

"That night," he said, "we feared a counter attack. Guards were posted all round the village, but they were tired and, perchance, slept. At dawn I heard a shot and a faint cry, but the sentry, who had fired, could not say what he had seen. 'Sidi, it was a vision!' he repeated; but there were only three heads on the gate-posts instead of four. The mountaineers were frightened. 'Did I not tell you so?' urged the sentry. 'It was a ghoul who eats human flesh.'

"Such creatures do not leave blood on the ground," I answered, and called to my slaves to come with me. We followed the track towards Anjera.

"At last, under an olive tree, we found our quarry. It was a girl and she was dead; but, in one arm, wrapped in the cleanest bit of her garment and pressed against her bosom, she held the head of her man. We covered her with a mantle and sent news to her village that there was a truce, and that, if her men-folk came to our town, they could return in safety with that which belonged to them."

There is a saying in Western Arabia that "a Jew, a woman, or a barber"—the three unarmed classes of society—can ride safely throughout the land. On the whole it is true, but if they are killed by brigands their death is generally settled by blood-money. It is by its fighting stock that an Eastern nation lives, so it naturally claims its greatest vengeance for the death of a warrior.

In Asir I have known a suspected highwayman to be built into a grave with the bones of the man he is supposed to have killed. The sepulchre is roomy. Air penetrates to him through cracks between the bricks. Food and water are handed in through a specially prepared hole, or sometimes he is provided with a week's supply of both. At the end of that time, his family can come and release him. If he is



guilty, the ghost of the dead man will have killed him. If innocent, he will have remained unharmed.

Poor highwaymen! They must always be guilty, for no one of them has ever come out of such a test alive. The Arab is too superstitious, too frightened of the ghoul let loose by the murdered man's desire for vengeance. Inside that tomb the brigand dies of his own terror.

Asir has many strange judicial customs. In the case of women criminals the suspect is forced to drink a cup of evil-tasting liquid. There is supposed to be a subtle poison in it, which will destroy the guilty and spare the innocent. The only time I saw it administered it gave the victim severe pains in her middle, but, after a few hours, she recovered, so the village was satisfied that she could not have committed the evil, though she might have known something about it.

I wanted to test the stuff by drinking some myself; but the judge refused, on the grounds that he did not know how it would affect a stranger. (I was posing as an Egyptian.) A slave woman of his house instantly picked up the jar and took a long draught. It had no effect on her at all. Was it faith or a cast-iron inside?

Asir knows, too, the terrors of the third degree, but it goes one better than America. It administers it in the dark. The late Emir of Asir, the Idrissi, was so holy that his face was never revealed to his followers. If he gave audience, it was by night, in pitch darkness.

In this manner he received me, the only European to visit his sacred capital, and, after an hour's conversation in stifling darkness, my nerves almost gave way. I imagined presences all round me, tangible pressure in the gloom, and other ridiculous things. Conceive then, the accused, brought for the first time into the presence of his Prophet-Prince whom no living man

has seen. Picture the intense, oppressive blackness and a mighty voice piercing it.

From my own experience I can witness that the voice appeared to move all over the huge room, to echo from half a dozen directions at once, to be at my ear one second and infinitely remote at the next. Yet I had committed no crime but that of curiosity. I should say the criminal had little chance of coming out of that darkness with his secrets intact. Hour after hour he is left there, bound and helpless, while a voice questions him.

"What is the longest any man has held out?" I asked.

"From one sunset to another," came the reply, "and he was innocent." His innocence was not much good to him, for he confessed, to escape from the torture of a voice. I asked if he was condemned.

"No," said my informant contemptuously. "He was a bad liar and a coward, but no more."

However cruel the Moslem East, it certainly tests its evidence, even its confessions. I imagine that few innocent men have been executed in modern Islam.

No beauty and charm on the part of a woman will save her; no political justification on the part of a man. On the other hand, no amount of chivalry will condemn either.

If a peasant is sacrificed to save a pasha, it is of his own free will and in return for something more important than life.

In Constantinople, before the war, a European was murdered. The embassies made pressing representations to the late Sultan. The Porte realized that something must be done. A murderer must be found, but for political reasons it could not be *the* murderer. The Sultan sent for a criminal condemned to incarceration for life.

"My son," he said, "you have committed much evil, and only my clemency has saved you from the executioner. A life-time's imprisonment cannot wipe out your crimes, for which you will suffer in Gehenna [hell], but, if you will confess to the recent murder of a European, all punishment after death will be remitted you. I, the Commander of the Faithful, promise you Paradise."

The criminal consented gladly. The embassies accepted the scapegoat. A mass of evidence was engineered to prove it was the right one, and everybody, most of all the condemned, was happy.

I read in a Chicago paper that a murderer had offered £10,000 for his defence. I cannot imagine even the richest Eastern wasting one-hundredth part of that sum to evade death. He would consider that his fortune was of more use to his family than his life.

In Morocco, before the Riffian war, an old chief had defied the French for years. He had sworn by the beard of the Prophet that he would never make peace with the infidel. The time came when his tribe was exhausted and such peace was inevitable. But the sheikh would not go back on his vow.

"There is another way," he said to his son. "Go you to the French. Make terms with them. Pretend to betray me. Lead the foreigners against me and I will come out to do battle with very few men. You must not fail to kill me. Then you will be the head of the tribe and the French will be so pleased that they will give you all you can ask for."

Justice must suit herself to the morals of her people. In the West, divorce is decorated by newspaper headlines. It carries no penalty. But a violation of traffic rules is punished with all the stringency of a, for once, united law! In the East it is more important to pre-

serve chastity than the speed limit. Just a difference in point of view, that is all—so is what we call cruelty.

In China, punishments are more severe than anywhere else on earth, except, perhaps, in Bolshevik Russia. On the coast, in Peking, and in the Treaty ports the old tortures have disappeared—we hope—but once another girl and I were prisoners of the Southern army. It was during an unauthorized attempt to cross the interior at the beginning of the present long-drawn-out war.

The place was on the Sian river, beyond Wy-a-Ping. I've forgotten the name of the general's head-quarters. Desultory battle was being waged all round us. The soldiers went out to it with rifles on their shoulders and parasols over their heads, women coolies carrying their ammunition. Sometimes spies were caught.

On one occasion the general sent us a message. Would we like to see death by a thousand cuts performed on a traitor? We refused, and shuddered through a horrible afternoon. By custom the victim may win death at the twenty-sixth cut, if he has not, up till then, uttered a sound, but, if the judge is in a bad temper, he may refuse this mercy.

Another form of execution was practised by both armies. A jar containing five knives was offered to the condemned. If he was lucky, he pulled out the knife which meant death. If fate was as cruel as his judge, he chose any of the other four, which stood for the amputation each of a separate limb. The choice had to be repeated by the victim, as long as he was conscious, afterwards by the executioner, until the knife of death appeared. Perhaps a sufficient bribe could arrange a mark on the handle, to avoid any such delay.

Chinese cruelty is indescribable, but it seemed to me that those who were forced to endure it had only



a hundredth part of our Western sensibility. The average coolie appeared to have no nerves and no imagination. At least, he died no deaths except the one to which he was condemned, suffered no pangs except those of the flesh. For us, anticipation of torture would always be worse than realization.

In the East there is generally no organized force to combat the thief and the murderer, but each man's hand is against him. Property, life and everything else is too uncertain for anyone willingly to add to their insecurity. Public opinion is solid against the outlaw. Every man in the village will hunt him.

"An eye for an eye," is the law of Islam, but it must be the right eye, or at least an eye that is willing to pretend to be the right one. Every Moslem is out to make his business or his family existence a bit more secure. There are no chinks through which the criminal can escape. Moreover, the East has learnt to distinguish between incidents and events. It wastes no time on punishing misdemeanours. Its justice is not tangled up with rules and regulations, closing hours and licences, and a thousand irrelevant precedents that waste time, money and energy. It is out to get the criminal, and it gets him.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WOMEN WHO NEVER LIE

**I**MAGINE the havoc, the eruption or revolution—I can think of no word explosive enough—if each lovely liar in Europe were condemned to baldness. Yet this is the law of Abyssinia. There, the price of a lie is a forcible public shave. There are no courts of justice, and any citizen may be asked to interrupt his gossip, or his business, to act as temporary judge.

Conceive him, seated under the trees of the market square, listening to the case. If he is puzzled, he will ask the litigants to wager on the truth of their words.

“I’ll lay you a dozen jars of honey that you lie,” insists the plaintiff.

“Mary save us—is that all your truth is worth? I’ll back my story with a bullock,” retorts the defendant. Bets rise higher, till horses, houses, or even a wife may be the stake at issue. Then, perhaps, a woman is called. A fallen trunk or boulder is the witness-box. Wrapped in her white chamma—a shawl four yards long—round her neck the scarlet mateb—the cord which has marked the Christian Abyssinian for sixteen hundred years—she tells her tale.

By age-old tradition—relic, perhaps, of the days when Ethiopia was a matriarchate, knowing no law but its mothers’—a woman’s word is inviolate. It must be accepted without proof or question. Generally matron and maid are conscious of their high responsibility. They know that their mere statement can send a man to slow strangulation on the nearest

tree, or to the prison which is never full for long, since the prisoners are not fed. They measure their words, and Abyssinia is probably the one country where women are less talkative than men.

Their tongues are weighted, not only by responsibility, but by caution. A misstatement in the witness-box, a trifling perjury to placate the censorious, and, in open court, the judge will summon the executioner. Generally this office is combined with that of local butcher.

The functionary arrives at a run, with a monstrous pair of shears. He is followed by all the small boys of the town and a host of slave girls. Snip! snip! Wails from the false witness, who is relieved of her curls as rapidly as a sheep of its fleece. As victim and executioner indulge in a simultaneous flow of gesticulative abuse during the operation, its course is marked by cuts. More shrieks—but a friend supplies fresh butter. A little rubbing and the liar is set free, bald as an egg.

“She won’t get another husband in a hurry,” remark the gossips as she hastens away, and the local priest withdraws his robe, lest it be sprinkled by untruthful dust. The judge resumes the case, but, until her hair grows again, the dismissed witness is a pariah. Excommunicated by the family confessor, she can have no dealings, business or social, with her neighbours. Of course, she may seek refuge in a convent, last resort of the old and ugly, where her shaven crown will pass muster as the final disillusionment of the widowed, who know that time forbids any further experiments in matrimony. She is more likely to take counsel of the local wise woman—a species of witch, who brews love philtres, an evil-smelling paste made of the private portions of reptiles; and writes charms, which guides wear in their sandals to keep their feet on the right

path. Perhaps the seeress has the secret of a herbal hair tonic; but, even after her client's locks are fuzzing again all over her well-shaped head, she is branded in men's minds as a liar.

The whole fabric of Abyssinian justice is as curious as it is primitive.

If one man accuses another of any crime, the two are chained together until the case can be judged. If the couple are of opposite sexes, the plaintiff has to produce a man or a woman of his own family, according to the sex of the defendant, to be chained to him or her until judgment is given.

It is amusing to see such pairs wandering through the towns, linked by four or five feet of metal, and apparently on the best of terms. If there is any dispute between them, debtor and creditor are bound in the same way until the debt is liquidated.

In sudden disputes, or as a sign that immediate justice is demanded, two men, each perhaps claiming the ownership of a horse, or damage against each other's cattle, will knot together the ends of their chammas and, thus inseparable, precipitate themselves, vociferously, into the midst of any business.

The death penalty can only be imposed by the Empress, or her regent, Ras Tafari. In cases of treason or any crime against the imperial person, death is by means of slow strangulation from a tree in the public market.

Ordinary cases of murder are settled on a basis of blood-money. A human life is worth so much,<sup>1</sup> and any crime against it, so much less in proportion. If the family of the deceased will not accept blood-money (payable in the case of a woman<sup>2</sup> only to her blood-relations such as father and brothers), the murderer is

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps £20 in the case of a peasant, £100 for a headman.

<sup>2</sup> After the age of 45, a woman decreases rapidly in value and, at 50, I doubt if she would be worth more than 5s.



taken to "the Potters' Field" outside the city precincts and handed over to the avenging family. He must be killed exactly as he has killed, by knife or bullet or rope, as the case may be. Two policemen stand by to see that no torture is committed.

When I was in Addis Abeba, the capital of Abyssinia, a notorious bandit was condemned. On his way to execution he shouted of all the lions, elephants and men he had killed. The father of his last victim shot him with a rifle held a few inches from his head.

The policemen made formal demand of the avengers: "Are you satisfied that the blood debt is paid?" Receiving an answer in the affirmative, they returned to the town, and the murderer's relatives, who had watched the affair from a few yards' distance, immediately buried him in an already prepared grave.

Had the shot only stunned him, and the avenger been careless enough to acknowledge quittance of the blood-debt without making sure of death, the murderer would have been hurried away to hospital by his relatives and cured. On the same principle as in English law, which will not re-try a man for the same offence, he would have been safe from all further vengeance, for in Abyssinia it appears a man cannot be killed twice for the same crime. Nor can two men be executed for one offence.

Should an innocent person be executed by mistake, or by his own voluntary sacrifice, the real murderer is safe. He can boast of his crime all over the country and no justice but a sniper's bullet can reach him.

The best story of vengeance in kind is told of the days of Menelik the Conqueror, the late emperor. He was the Solomon of our time. A woodcutter, lopping off the top branches of a tree in the market, fell out of it and killed a man who was sleeping underneath. The foolish relatives refused to accept blood-money.

They dragged the unfortunate workman before Menelik, Lion of Judah, King of the Kings of Ethiopia.

"Yes," said the monarch, "you have the right to claim this man's death, but he must be killed in the same way as he killed your relation. You"—pointing to the father of the deceased—"must climb to the top of a tree and practise falling on the woodman, who will be laid beneath it, until you kill him. Of course, if you destroy yourself instead, one of your other sons must take your place as executioner."

The avengers gasped. After a very short consultation, they pleaded to be allowed to accept blood-money.

"Too late," said the emperor, and dismissed the case.

There was no wisdom of Menelik to help the embarrassed British Legation some years ago. Abyssinian law knows no manslaughter or accidental homicide. A groom in the employ of our minister was riding through the streets of the capital. The race-horse in his charge was nervous. It reared and plunged. Finally it kicked someone on the head and killed him. The groom was arrested for murder. It is a fact that not all the powers of diplomacy, not all the might of Britain, could save the man.

"If he'd only managed to get back to the legation," said the minister, "we could have given him sanctuary on British ground, but for the rest of his life he would have had to stay within our fence."

A dramatic story was told to me in Lasta, a northern and almost unexplored province of Abyssinia. There was a girl, young, slender and proud-featured, as are many descendants of the three-thousand-year-old Jewish race which lingers among the mountains; legacy of the days when the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba first ruled in Abyssinia. Her parents married

her as a child to their friend and contemporary. Later, a youth of her own age loved her and, having won her heart, he shot her husband in the ensuing quarrel. Since he had no blood relations, it became the girl's duty to avenge her dead lord.

Her parents refused her plea to accept blood-money. A gun was forced into her hands. Her lover, condemned by eye-witnesses before the local judge, was placed, bound, in front of her.

"Shoot straight!" commanded her father, "our honour is in your hands." The two policemen, who must attend to see no torture is committed, withdrew a few paces. Man and maid stared into each other's eyes and read, who knows what?—of love and faith and terror.

"What delays you?" urged the avengers and pushed the girl nearer. Her rifle, when she raised it, was but a foot from her lover's forehead. The first barrel misfired. Her brothers dragged the man down and held him on the ground.

"Make no further mistake," they said. The girl fired into the grass.

"Are you satisfied that the blood-debt has been paid?" demanded the policemen, automatically, expecting a negative and the reloading of the ancient rifle.

"Yes," lied the girl magnificently. "By the death of Menelik, I am." There was a pause of sheer amazement, for, with this oath, the most solemn in the Abyssinian language, the avenger acknowledges quittance of all obligation. Once the words have crossed his or her lips, the blood-debt is paid in full.

"A lie, a lie!" shouted the crowd. "He is not dead, he is not even hit!"

But a woman's word should be inviolate. The lad went free and the girl was dragged to the shearer.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A HAREM NIGHT'S ADVENTURE

THE grimmest justice that ever I saw administered was the work of a madman in Damascus, when that war-rent city was capital of its own turbulent Arab state. The old houses leaned together, whispering their secrets above my head. Starlight glinted on great iron-studded doors that looked as if they had not been opened since the days of Haroun al-Raschid. The scent of apricots was heavy on a wind which blew across Damascus gardens.

"This is the house, lady," whispered my guide, a black slave, so muffled in his silk kufiya that only his eyes showed above its folds.

A dull scarlet door swung open at our approach and a row of Abyssinians salaamed as I entered. A girl's voice called to me gaily: "You are welcome, but you tarried and our desires went far on the road to meet you."

Upstairs I went, to a large room furnished with hard-backed chairs and a few stiff French tables. There was a piano in one corner, and the violent, unshaded light beat down on thirty or forty women in European dress. I blinked, confused, for I had expected a different setting in the pasha's harem. Most of the women were young and nearly all were pale, with brown eyes and hair; but, as I murmured greetings, repetitively monotonous, I found myself suddenly staring at the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. Tall and slight, with lines that curved subtly from slim



throat to ankle, she carried her head with a pride worthy of its small perfection. My hostess, Nazek el Heieri, noticed my amazement.

"This is Aziza, daughter of Sa-ad Pasha, a friend of my father's," she said, and I stammered something polite, while I still stared at the great, heavy-lidded eyes, ridiculously painted, and the wonderful mouth.

"It really is like a scarlet flower," I thought, as the lips curved back in a smile like petals before the sun.

"Nazek, she is astoundingly beautiful," I murmured.

"She knows it," returned my hostess. "How can she help it? Her mother was a Circassian slave—that's why she is grey eyed and fair skinned."

Solemnly I was introduced to the other guests who had ranged themselves stiffly round the walls. They all looked tired and their expressions were heavy and dull. Everybody sat bolt upright and no one spoke except Nazek, who addressed formal remarks to me. Slaves in white turbans and colourless prints brought coffee and cold water at intervals, but there was no movement till a slight Syrian girl, with eyes which seemed to have burned great pits in her face, went to the piano and began singing a Turkish lament. She wore a French frock of palest green, with pearls run round her throat, but her music was harsh and discordant. Another girl, Hauwa, picked up an audh and thrummed a tune which was without rhythm or harmony. It was instinct with force and tragedy and Aziza stirred lazily. With a shrug of sloping shoulders, she slid on to the floor.

"It is her way," explained Nazek. "She is very unconventional, but we forgive her because she is so lovely."

I gazed down at a picture which would have shat-

tered the complacency of the Venus de Medici. Every feature appeared to have been moulded by a master sculptor who was also a lover, and bosom and hips had that lissom unbroken curve so rare in the athletic West. For the first time in my life, I decided that Swinburne might be justified of his adjectives! I thought of Helen, of Salome, of L'Enclos, of all the beautiful women whose faces had changed the destiny of nations and I raged against the custom which cloistered their successor. Aziza smiled up at me with the same lazy charm.

"You are thinking about me, I know," she said. The blue kohl glistened beneath her eyes.

"Why do you paint so much?" I asked. "It is criminal to spoil such a picture."

"That is what they all say," returned Aziza; "but perhaps you wouldn't notice my eyes at all except for the kohl."

"She likes being noticed," remarked Bahia. "It will be better for her to be married."

I looked my question and Nazek whispered in my ear: "She loves an Egyptian and her father would kill her if he knew."

In spite of the matter-of-fact voice in which the words were uttered, they were so full of conviction that I shivered a little and tried to reassure myself by looking round the conventional room. It seemed to me that silence brooded over it like a tangible presence. Nazek broke it.

"Would you like to see a real Turkish fantasia?" she asked. I nodded, but my thoughts were far away.

"How does she see the Egyptian?" I asked my hostess, when Hauwa and some other girls had slipped away to prepare for the dance.

"Allah forbid that I should know!" returned Nazek, and I thought even her lips were pale.

"There are ways——" she whispered. "Allah grant her folly is not discovered."

There was a stir at the door. "The musicians, lady!" announced a slave, and a group of old women came in and crouched in a corner. They looked very ancient, with their shrivelled hands and feet, but they kept their indigo wraps so closely over their faces that only their eyes shone, fierce and reddened among the folds. I watched them, interested in the swift movement of their drumming fingers, and then I noticed that one, stronger built and taller than the rest, was less accomplished. She missed a beat occasionally and her eyes were eager with the youth which had long been a stranger to her companions. A minute later Hauwa returned dressed in tight black knickers and a dark jersey with a scarlet sash. She looked like a fisher-boy and her hair fell to her knees. She stood shyly in the circle of her friends, blushing and pulling her splendid hair across her face. Then, encouraged by the drummers, she spun round with arms outstretched. Gradually the rhythm changed and the dancer slipped into a pose of languorous hesitation. Swiftly, she dropped on one knee before a girl who laughed and drew away. In mimic, Hauwa went through the form of proposal and rejection. Then, still kneeling, she flung herself backward till her dark hair was spread like a fan on the floor.

"That is a salutation," explained Nazek. "Some day, she will do it for her husband."

The curious dance went on, but I watched it no longer, for Aziza, leaning against my knees, had grown suddenly tense. The thrill of her tautened muscles communicated itself to me, and I felt as if she were waiting and watching for something which in a second would be revealed to me too. Unconsciously, my glance followed the direction of her eyes and I found

myself staring—staring at the musicians. Their supple fingers hypnotized me as they beat on gourd and drum, but I knew there was something behind the passion and the wildness of their music, something I did not yet understand. I could feel Aziza shiver as she pressed against me, with no movement to warn the others of that swift tension which held her in a vice. A pulse throbbed just above her jaw and, for a fleeting second, I caught the eyes of the young musician as they swept over every line of the lovely creature below me, hotly, with a fever of possession, as I had seen no woman's eyes look at a woman. My throat went suddenly dry and I felt cold sweat on my forehead.

It was some minutes before I dared look round the room, but the heavy faces were immobile, absorbed in the dance. With a swift movement that showed her sustained grace and strength, Aziza sprang to her feet and began posturing opposite the flushed, excited Hauwa. I felt as if an electric current had been switched off and, furtively, wondering if my imagination had run away with me, I looked at the musicians. The strong, sinuous hands of the tallest figure looked more used to bridle and trigger than to the instrument they held and neglected. With chin thrust forward and body strained in attention, the mysterious player followed each movement of Aziza. The girl danced as if intoxicated, acting the woman's part before the passion simulated by Hauwa. Eagerly, the one advanced while the other retreated, eluded, encouraged by a half surrender. It was the old combat of sex, and every gesture of love Aziza flung as a challenge to the motionless figure among the musicians. My breath caught in my throat. Would no one notice? I was afraid of what my own eyes would reveal, so kept them fixed on the dancers. The music throbbed to a climax. Aziza bent backwards till her whole



supple body lay relaxed over the other girl's arm. The pantomime would have been pretty but for the sense of terror waiting.

"You see we really do not need men," said Hauwa, breathless. "Oh, Aziza, your hair got into my mouth. I am glad I am not your lover."

"She is very proud of her hair," whispered Nazek. "She washes it twice a week in spices." But I was not listening.

All the women were laughing and talking, as if the dance had released the youth in their blood. But Aziza stood aloof, very pale and watchful. The musicians collected their instruments and shuffled towards the door. The tall figure was the last to go, stumbling clumsily over its draperies. Aziza slipped after them and Nazek called to her: "Do not trouble. They have been well rewarded."

Without conscious volition, I found myself clutching the curtains which hung across the door. I heard the shuffle of heel-less slippers as the musicians crept down the stairs. Then came a woman's swift, passionate protest and a man's voice clearly: . . . "Little heart of me, your skin has the scent of peaches—I shall dream of you in my garden."

A sob sounded beside me and I turned to look into the terrified eyes of Nazek.

"Allah, defend us!" she said, and pulled the curtains apart. Aziza was leaning against the wall and I had the impression of one blind and deaf . . . The tallest musician was disappearing round the bend of the stairs.

Without reason I looked upwards; and straight into a face bent over the landing above. For a second I stared at rage incarnate in the eyes of Sa-ad Pasha, Aziza's father. Then the face was withdrawn and, speechless, I moved my dry lips. The ecstasy died

out of Aziza's face, as Nazek caught her arm. "What folly have you committed?" she hissed at her. "Is it death you want?"

I stumbled down the stairs, my one idea to get away from the house, from the shadow which hung over it. . . .

The following noon I rode among the gardens which encircle Damascus. I cantered between mud walls, leaping the small streams that rippled across my path, but always a shadow rode with me and its face was distorted with rage. To stifle memory, I tried to count the golden globes which dripped from every branch. Unexpectedly I found myself looking into a wide garden where an old man gathered his peaches. His figure was bent, but there was a massive strength about his shoulders. He fondled the velvet fruit with fingers that were cruel for all their sensitive delicacy. A stone clattered from my horse's hoofs, and the man looked up. At first, it was his expression of fury, stifled and inchoate, that struck me, and then I recognized the face which had looked over the staircase the night before. My spurs went home, but my last glimpse of Sa-ad Pasha showed him still gazing at his peaches.

An hour later I was at Nazek's door, scarcely knowing why I had come. I was taken at once to the harem, where I found Aziza in a mood so remote and inarticulate that, in the end, I sat silently behind the latticed shutters. It was very hot, but Aziza neither stirred nor spoke till a slave lifted the curtains and, mysteriously, with a finger on her lips and a dozen backward glances, placed a basket before her mistress.

"It was a stranger who brought it," she said, "but he said: 'Tell thy lady her skin has the scent of peaches, so it is right that these, which are the finest in my garden, should be hers.'"

Once again Aziza the beautiful came to life. A slow, deep flush burned to her temples and the little pulse beat in her throat. With a croon of delight she picked up the basket as a mother lifts her first child, and slipped soundlessly from the room.

It was sunset when Nazek and I, weary with unprofitable discussion, went in to see why the object of all our solicitude still slept. The inner room was ablaze with reflected amber and rose. Aziza lay on a couch, her head tilted back, a half-eaten peach still clutched in her hand. A black, fluffy kitten sniffed uneasily at the basket which was encircled by her other arm. She was so exquisitely still that she looked like a dream statue. We crept forward, a little awed. The next instant a cry wailed out, and it was so sudden that I hardly realized who had screamed till Nazek's fingers bruised my arm.

"Allah save us, she is dead!"

Unbelieving, I touched the beautiful thing on the piled orange cushions. With my hand still outstretched, I stared at Nazek and found my own horror mirrored in her face

"Her father saw her last night—he heard . . ."

The voice trailed into silence and, rigid, my fingers still touching cold flesh, I saw again the garden where old Sa-ad Pasha fondled his peaches as if they were the weapons of his revenge.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE RESTLESS WEST

THE drama of the peaches, of course, is no more typical of harem life than the brides-in-the-bath case represents the normal attitude of Englishmen to their wives. Generally speaking, the harem is as commonplace as the selectest of middle-class seminaries and there is as little romance about it.

When I was lecturing in America I got so tired of that ill-used word "romance." Every "small-town" wife seemed to think that, if only she could be transported on a magic carpet from Illinois to Aleppo, she would achieve in an hour all that the Rockefeller Commission, organized to inquire into the specific reasons of her discontent, had failed to do for her in spite of reams of foolscap and psycho-analysis.

There is a great deal of placid common sense among the women of the Arab East, but the only romance is in their religion, or in their passionate attachment to the race whose continuity they guard as an undying flame.

In order to compare the lives of Eastern women with our own, it is better to begin at the bottom of the scale with the simplest and least denaturalized races.

On the Fly River in New Guinea, a girl is marriageable at fourteen, but, before she makes her debut, she has to go in for a severe course of beauty culture. For six months she is shut up in a specially built hut, which she may not leave and which only her feminine relations may enter. She is fed on oils and fats to make



her plump; for in New Guinea, as in every Eastern country and most Latin ones, the line of beauty is a curve. Every day a portion of her body is tattooed with a sharp-pointed stick dipped in some corrosive herbal mixture, which burns, and at the same time heals, the flesh.

At the end of her period of seclusion, the girl has a bodice of blue and black tattooing, necklace and bracelets of the same, while her thighs look as if they were sheathed in lace tights. Her lower lip and forehead are adorned by the same process, and sometimes her hands seem to be encased in semi-transparent mittens. The more tattooing, the more beautiful she is supposed to be.

Suitors flock around her, but no youth may win a bride until he can adorn her hut with the skull of a defeated enemy. The maid hangs a fibre basket outside her door, and the most determined of her lovers goes man-hunting. When the basket is full of skulls, the wedding feast is celebrated.

Among some desert people the girl is mounted on the fleetest white camel and allowed to cross the horizon before her suitors follow.

But the women of these primitive peoples appear to have a better time than among the semi-civilized.

The Chinese girl is subject absolutely to the will of her father or husband. She is given in marriage to a man she may never have seen, and the greater her position, the less contact she has with the outer world.

The Hindu girl is as smothered in customs as she is in her trailing draperies. She, of all Eastern women, was, and in some places still is, to be pitied. Her father's salvation depends on his marrying off his daughters before they are five, at which mature age it is supposed that children may begin to think evil

By some remote tradition, the Hindu widow is held responsible for her husband's death, however much older he may be. For centuries she expiated her fault—committed perhaps in a former incarnation—by performing suttee on his funeral pyre. However, the British Government forbade suttee, and widows now linger in a disgraceful servitude till nature, or their own wit, provides a way out.

Of course, among the more modern families, remarriage, especially of children, is common, and in others the father buys back his daughter at the price of a heifer or some goats. But still, among the orthodox and old-fashioned, a widow is cursed with her husband's death. She is the slave of his relations, and her life is without prospect, pleasure, or adornment. Her only escape is through the temple.

There are, especially in Nepal and such holy cities as Benares, certain temples which only men are allowed to enter. Once a year 500 young widows are admitted. For a fortnight they live in the outer courts, while the priest makes choice of the most beautiful to act as temple dancing girls. A dozen are chosen. The rest disappear. Nobody knows what happens to them. In olden days it was supposed that they were burned alive, but this horrible holocaust did not prevent another 500 clamouring for admittance the following year.

I suspect that there was, and is, some exit through the temple to another stratum of life, in which these young widows become servants or possibly wives in families less orthodox than their own.

Not much romance for the woman of China or India, is there?

But what about the Arabs, those desert people who have been pilloried by untravelled novelists in order to provide a thrill for unsatisfied Western womanhood?

First of all, it is impossible to talk of the Arabs as a mass. Among them there are all degrees of civilization, varying from the simplicity of the tent-dwellers whose mentality is bounded by water, war, and storm, to the sophistication of the Syrian or Egyptian merchants, who might well pass as Parisians. The law regarding women is the same, but it is very differently interpreted.

The Arab ideal of beauty is, "the face like a full moon, the chin like a ball in a cup, the cheeks like smooth goat's butter, the eyes of a gazelle, the waist of a lion, the gait of an elephant, and the hips so heavy that they incommode the walk."

An Arab may have only four wives at a time, and divorce is common. Husband or wife may secure it at will, merely by repeating three times in the presence of witnesses, "I divorce thee." They may re-marry three times after such a divorce, but the third separation is final, unless another marriage on the part of the woman intervenes. In some cases such a temporary marriage is arranged by the quarrelsome but still-devoted pair, and the momentary husband, who is necessary to enable them to re-wed, is called "the man of straw."

No stigma attaches to the divorcée. In fact, experience adds to her charms, and as her dowry in full must be returned to her when she leaves each husband, she very soon secures another.

No Moslem ever wants the full quota of four wives at a time, because he is obliged, by law, to treat them all equally. Imagine having to buy four pearl necklaces instead of one, four dressmakers' bills to pay, four sets of complaints to hear. Moreover, the Moslem must divide his time and his attentions equally among his wives. There can be no favourite.

Also, by law, every Arab woman is entitled to the

sole guardianship of her daughter until the latter is marriageable; of her son till he is five. Her rights—social, material, and financial—are far better guarded than ours. No European woman is as independent by law as the Moslem. In Belgium a woman's signature is not valid in law. In Italy she cannot get a passport without her husband's consent. In France her husband's permission is necessary before she can go into business, or even sell her own personal possessions. In England the guardianship of all children belongs to the husband unless a divorce court pronounces him guilty.

In many European countries a woman can plead in a law court only if backed by her husband. Often she has no control over her property when she marries.

None of these limitations applies to the Arab woman. After the age of sixteen, she is, legally, complete mistress of her person and her property. Before that age she can be married with her own and her guardian's consent. After it, only her own consent is necessary. She can appeal against her husband to any court and the qadi (judge) is bound to decide her case according to the Koran, which is the greatest safeguard of woman's rights ever written. In fact, she has a unique position in law.

By custom and tradition it is quite different, but this is by reason of climate, education, and human nature. In the simplest form of Arab life, where civilization is translated as religion, the women have the mentality of domestic cats. They cannot think. They cannot remember, or concentrate, or look ahead.

Once, in Yemen, I spent some time in a merchant's harem, waiting for a caravan that was delayed by sickness and drought. There were three wives and a number of feminine relations of all ages, with the usual quota of slaves—coal-black Abyssinians with beautiful teeth.



The Arab women were very small, of scarcely more than child's stature, pale, small-boned, slender, with the most exquisite feet and hands. They looked for too fragile to produce children or even cook a dinner. All were expressionless and wore the same kind of clothes—a bright orange cotton shirt to the knees, over a red-and-white striped waistcoat, and a long fringed kilt twisted round the hips and fastened, apparently, by magic. Their silver jewellery was so heavy that it made grooves in their wrists and ankles.

We all slept in the same room, a huge, bare, mud-walled apartment on the roof. A wide bench ran round three sides of it, and on this we spread carpets and the hard little bolsters that serve as pillows in the East. An Arab woman always sleeps curled up like a cat, her knees almost under her chin—it is immodest to lie out straight.

The sun woke us before 6 a.m., and we trooped to the bathroom, a mud-walled chamber, empty but for a vat of water in one corner and a groove in the floor to carry away the waste. We stood in a line, scrubbing each other's backs with a paste that smelt of marigolds. Then there was breakfast to prepare. It consisted of goats' milk, honey, a very thin unleavened bread that could be folded up like a sheet of paper, and rice.

It is discourteous to use more than the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand in eating, so henna-tinted fingers, that looked absurdly fragile, had, by constant practice, acquired the strength of talons.

Then there were children to tend; clothes to mend and wash; prayers to be said, perfunctorily, for the Arab woman is not so devout as her lord; someone's hair to be dyed bright pink with a herbal paste; hands to be painted with a lacy mitten of black by means of a sharpened quill; toenails to be reddened, and so on,

All too soon the day's great work began—dinner!

It appeared to be a simple meal and it was always the same—mutton, rice, and unleavened bread—but it took twenty women most of the morning to prepare it. To each one of us was entrusted a special task. For instance, one woman would blow the fire, her head flat on the ground. Another would mix the dough. A third would pour relays of it on to a flat pan. A fourth would stir this into shape. And a fifth would lift off each sheet in turn, pulling it while still warm into the necessary thinness. The food was piled on huge leather trays and sent to the men's quarters. We ate the remnants that returned, or trimmings shorn from the original mountains of flesh and grain.

Afterwards there was a general relaxing. Most of the women went to sleep, their turbans pulled over their faces to keep away the flies. Some just sat, completely motionless, their minds, I am convinced, as blank as their expressions. I once asked a Yemen woman: "What do you do with yourselves all day?" She answered: "We eat, we sleep, we talk." "But after that—what else?" I insisted. She stared at me, puzzled. "What else is there?" she asked.

The whole of an Arab woman's day is punctuated by her children. They are with her in everything she does—in the crook of her arm while she cooks, on her knees while she talks, leaning against her while she does her hair.

There is no jealousy among co-wives. They devote as much love and care to each other's children as they do to their own.

We used to say our sunset prayers on the roof, before descending to prepare the merchant's supper and our own. The babies were slung in cotton scarves, like hammocks, underneath the benches and, when the evening meal was finished—more mutton, rice, and pumpkin sprinkled with red pepper—we would sit

above them, our bare feet turned outward, knees flat on the rug.

A long-stemmed water-pipe would be handed round. With a handful of melon seeds to crack and an occasional pull at the pipe, we would sit interminably, scarcely talking, never moving, until the wife, whose turn it was to keep their master company, would slip away to another mud room across the acres of moonlit roof. One by one, the women who remained would take their heavy turbans off their heads and wrap them around their feet, curling up like animals to sleep among the cracked seeds.

Such is the life of the most primitive Arab women. Yet they are content. The last thing they would want to do would be to leave their harem.

The romance of a Moslem woman's life is in her children. Talk to her of love and she will not connect it with a man at all. She will apply it to her sons, her family, and her co-wives. If a fortune-teller visits the harem—a crone, incredibly bent and withered, who traces the future in the sand—she speaks of motherhood, not of wifehood. Where the palmist of the Occident predicts a husband, the desert seer prophesies: “You are a favourite of Allah. Twin sons will you bear next year, and one of them will be great and bring much honour to your house.”

This one thread is found throughout the East. It links the brainless, pussy-cat women of Yemen to their highly educated, polyglot co-religionists of Egypt, Turkey, and Syria. Otherwise there is no more similarity between Bedouin harems and those of the Mediterranean merchants and pashas than there is between the hut of a Hopi Indian and a flat in Park Lane.

The majority of educated women in the East are as discontented as those of the extreme West, but for a

different reason. They are still struggling for the independence we have won, but do not know how to use.

In Turkey the recent feminine emancipation has meant free love.

In Egypt the movement has meant higher heels and thinner veils, but it has not breached the wall between the sexes. Occasionally, a pasha's daughter sees her fiancé before marriage. A mutual friend arranges that they shall visit the same shop at the same moment, or the man is waiting at an arranged corner and the girl leans from her carriage with veil blown aside. But this does not always happen.

In Syria, the women have had to fight for the independence of their country as well as their own, so they have acquired a sense of proportion, lacking as much in the West as in the East.

I have two great friends in Damascus, Zarifa and Nazek el Abed. When I first knew Zarifa her father had arranged her marriage with an elderly pasha.

"How can you bear it?" I asked.

"What a lot of importance you attach to men," mocked Zarifa.

"But he already has a wife!" I protested.

The beauty condescended to be serious for a moment.

"We share our husbands," she said, "but we never share our children." She pointed an accusing finger at me. "You waste your motherhood. You give your children to strangers, to nurses, governesses and schoolmasters; we keep ours for ourselves."

"Don't you want to keep your husbands also for yourselves?"

Again the elusive smile. "My dear, how conceited your men must become if you so obviously can't do without them!" A pause, then, "Marriage," said



Zarifa, "is the gate to motherhood, and, through our sons, we are masters of the future."

One day she invited me to a harem party. By the way, the harem is not a mysteriously curtained-off place, overburdened with cushions and reeking with scent or incense. The word is taken from *haram*, which means *forbidden* to strangers—except one or two rooms near the front door, called the "selamlik," or men's quarters, where the host receives his visitors. The present-day harem is furnished like any Western house, only there is nothing soft about it. Cushions in the East always seem to be stuffed with young potatoes.

The party to which I was invited took place in a Louis XIV room, stiff with gilt and pink brocade. The girls wore European evening dresses and pearls. We ate a great many sweet cakes and drank iced water. There were music and singing. One woman played a guitar. Her sister sang Turkish songs to an audh. Others performed what they call a "story dance," much like Russian ballet and very well done.

The party finished with a rather learned discussion on psychology, and my hostess quoted authorities in French, English, and Italian. It was not at all unlike a meeting at an educational club. In fact, Middle Western America, where the club habit is most highly developed, seems to me to resemble pretty closely the harem life of the East.

I remember a heated discussion in Damascus with Nazek. This daughter of El Abed Pasha was, at twenty-four, the feminist leader of Syria. She had founded orphanages, girls' schools, and a woman's newspaper, yet she wore the double black veil that completely hides the face and is so thick you can hardly see through it. At that time Damascus had an old-fashioned pasha, who disapproved of change. By his order, the police were armed with enormous scissors,

with which they slashed the clothes of any woman who was immodest enough to show the least bit of wrist or ankle beneath her all-enveloping black habbara or cloak.

"It's monstrous!" I commented.

Nazek looked at me, amused. "Surely it is a trifle, not worth bothering about; but then, in the West, you do make an awful fuss about trifles." I remained dumb. "You are so occupied in doing things," she continued, "that you have no time to *be* anything at all."

I roused myself to defend our civilization. I drew a picture of what I considered an ideal married life. I spoke of love, comradeship, and mutual interests, of doing everything together, of how an English husband expected his wife to golf with him and hunt with him, to share his play as well as his work. Nazek listened with a comical expression of dismay. "Are all European husbands as trying as that?" she asked.

I told her of our men friends, our business interests. "How busy you must be. Do you ever have time to think?" she queried. And then, with a laugh, "It seems to me the great difference between us is that we spend our lives making one man happy; you spend yours making many men miserable."

Afterwards we went up on the roof. There was an exquisite view of the famous apricot gardens that frame Damascus, and, beyond them, the gold of the desert.

"Don't you ever want to get out of all this? To be free?" I said incoherently, waving an arm at Mount Hermon.

"Freedom," said Nazek, "is inside us. You are much less free than we are."

I was silent. It is true. We are prisoners of a thousand habits, of our work, of our business, of our restlessness, of our dissatisfaction. The best of the Eastern women are free because they are content.

I remembered a visit to a modern American factory, where I had seen a row of girls seated in front of an equal number of disks. When the arrow on the dial reached a certain figure, each girl put out her right hand and pulled over a lever. The whole of the life of her body, the whole of the intelligence of her day were concentrated in the physical effort of moving that lever at the correct moment.

One of the overseers explained: "We've improved that device. These levers are a bit heavy. Next year the girls will only have to use a finger to pull them across." In fact, for eight hours a day, the girls' life will be narrowed from a hand to a finger.

It is the same with all of us. Under the concentrated pressure of modern life, we are becoming just the fingers that move the typewriter keys, the foot that presses the brake, the eyes that watch a quivering pressure-mark on a dial, the hand that jams in bolt or rivet as the machinery glides past. We are using only one cell of our brain and one limb of our body. I explained this caricature of modern life to Nazek. "You are very efficient," she commented, "but you're not free."

Two small boys toddled on to the roof. "It's time for lessons," she said, and laughed back at me over her shoulder, a child clinging to each hand.

Nazek, although progressive in spirit, is entirely happy among the children, for whom she has done so much. She has no time for the longings that agitate her Western sisters. Hers is the typical Eastern viewpoint, all but incomprehensible to the women of the West. She has found romance in her sons, and in the sons of her friends. But the women of the West, surrounded by every luxury except romance, are still groping.

## CHAPTER XIX

### HAPPINESS AS AN ADVENTURE

I HAVE met three completely happy people in the course of my wanderings and each one of them was an adventure in himself, so that I remember them not so much as personalities, but as pictures.

The first was a Libyan Bedouin, the second an American millionaire and the third a melon-seller in Tunisia.

Abdul Rahman, our guide on the return journey from Kufara, the secret valley of the Sahara, was the only man who would venture to lead us by an unknown and waterless route to Egypt, and he started out on a thousand-mile trek with no luggage but a staff and a string of beads. Bent and spare, with one pale, hopeful eye—blind in the other because, as he explained, he had once interfered in a quarrel between two soldiers—he wrapped his solitary garment round him, remarked that he had no need of sandals, for his feet were harder than the desert, and set off into a waste, where the only signposts were the stars and his own sense of direction.

It was so cold at nights that we crawled into our flea-bags, fully dressed, and lay on our hands to thaw them. The guide crouched like a white mushroom in the moonlight and refused all offers of blankets.

"Of what use?" he said. "I am content."

There was a sandstorm which turned twenty-four hours into a nightmare, wherein men laboured blindly, blood searing their flayed skins. The camels blundered in circles, groaned, and subsided into heaps. Old Abdul



Rahman trailed calmly ahead, murmuring a fragment of song through the dust-choked folds he had wound across his mouth.

Eventually, amidst a turmoil of sand breakers, he pointed to a rift in the smother.

"Be content," he smiled. "It is possible there will be no great storm."

At the end of the journey, seventeen days of marching on short rations from before dawn till after sunrise, Abdul Rahman's jerd<sup>1</sup> was as worn as his crumpled old face. We offered him a new one. He replied, "It is too much. The desert would not know me."

When we reached the edge of civilization, he slept for nineteen hours, then turned south again.

"There is no happiness in towns," he said.

"Are you happy?" I asked.

"Of course," he answered. "I have no possessions, and, under Allah, I am free."

The American millionaire had many possessions, but they were in a continual state of flux. One week he would buy half a Russian art exhibition and take a new block of flats to house it. The next, he would invite his friends of every rank and habit to choose as many pictures as they liked, and his walls would be bare, till the Prince of Mecca sent him some carpets, or one of his protégés insisted on covering them with terrible frescoes. He had unnumbered motor cars and everybody in New York used them except himself. This may have shown a slight instinct for self-preservation on his part, for his drivers were always strange, dark waifs, dumb or incomprehensible, whom the man-of-millions had rescued from fate in inaccessible lands. They knew nothing of "silent policemen," or one-way streets, and charged Fifth Avenue as they would their tribal enemies.

<sup>1</sup> A jerd is a native garment like a sheet.

I am not certain how this millionaire or his fathers made such wealth, but I know that whenever we turn on a tap we add to it. He is the Emperor of plumbing, and he collects people, not things. All over the world he has selected youth, educated it at the finest American schools, given it as far as possible the Anglo-Saxon point of view and financed it in its chosen career, as doctor, lawyer, author, sometimes as patriot or revolutionary—the terms are synonymous in the East. His mind is a dictionary of humanity, his house a club, and he has contributed, not hospitals and libraries to the world's good, but new-made men and women.

If you lunch in any of the series of flats which house, for longer or shorter periods, his human collection, you would meet the well-known and the unknown on equal terms. Anna Pavlova and Wells, Ruth Draper laughing over her greatest American season, Péliot, the foremost French Orientalist, Sir Percy Sykes, our successful Persian pro-consul, and Dr. Shahbender, future president of an united Syria, might be eating anything from Scotch haggis to Arabian cous-cous with an Egyptian girl in the process of transmutation into a fully-qualified masseuse and the schoolboy sons of Halida Hanem, the Turkish feminist.

The host, having made separate and individual plans for the future entertainment of each guest and the reception or expedition of countless others, ex-royalties or future workers, would be silent, benign and slightly aloof. He would eat little, drink not at all, and, with a smile as young as his clothes were old, look out of pale, hopeful eyes at unmeasured horizons. An hour later, if you rang up his Bulgarian secretary, you might hear that he had started for Russia to see Trotsky, or was, at the age of seventy, packing one small suit-case for a ride through Afghanistan.

The melon-seller was old and a cripple. All day

he sat in the shadow of the mosque, with a pile of green fruit beside him. His eyes were sunk in a netting of creases, and his turban swallowed up forehead and cheeks. His neck was like a reed and his hands claws covered with chicken skin, but his voice was gold stroked with velvet.

"Tell us a story. Tell us a story," begged the passers-by, and there would be a flash between sunken lids.

A sheikh would dismount to listen, a judge pause on his way to court. Lawyers, merchants, students would swell the audience, for this old man was a wizard and his spells were words.

While the sun stole the shadows from the sand, he told of Nazr ed Din el Khawaja, a courtier of old Persia.

"What are those tall tubes behind you?" asked a stranger of this mediæval wit, pointing to the turquoise minarets of Samarkand.

"Wells," said Nazr ed Din. "They've been pulled up out of the ground and stuck there to dry!"

The tyrant emperor, Tamarlane—Timour, the lame—raged and wept one day because his mirror showed him the ugliest man of his century. The courtiers protested vehemently enough to reassure their master, but Nazr ed Din cried louder than the emperor.

"What is the matter?" roared the despot.

"You wept because you had one glance at yourself in the mirror. How much more should I weep who have to see you all day long," returned el Khawaja.

The melon-seller paused to rearrange his fruit "What happened? What did Tamarlane do to the bold one?" demanded the crowd.

"Nothing," said the story-teller. "The tongue of Nazr ed Din was mightier than the emperor's scimitars."

"So is your own," said the first minister of Tunis.

I took a rising stockbroker, his mind full of figures and facts, to hear the story-teller. The old man blinked black fire at us and began: "Nazr ed Din was riding one day with a stranger, who pointed to a pile of melons like these and asked what they were. 'Mules' eggs,' answered el Khawaja. 'Have you never seen them before?' The stranger bought one and carried it out of the town. After a while he dropped it and it burst at his feet. At that moment a buck rabbit ran across the path. 'Oh, oh, there goes my baby mule!' wailed the stranger."

"A silly story," said the rising stockbroker, when I had translated.

"But a wonderful old man," I suggested.

"I don't see why—he doesn't *do* anything."

"Perhaps that's why he's remarkable," I said.

Most of us are the slaves of the things we've done. Around us are the sentries posted by opinions which we believe convictions, and we bustle like squirrels in a revolving cage lest we miss anything inessential. Our imagination is stifled by steam-heating and the telephone, by the efficiency of our mechanisms. Pegasus is lamed by trains de luxe and aeroplanes.

We make the most of our time and so little of ourselves. "What has your civilization done for you?" asked Raisuli, who would have been a happy man, if his philosophy could have withstood the strain of palaces as it did of a dungeon. "It has given you security and taken away hope."

That is why I go East and travel by mule or camel for slow weeks and months, in countries where there are no small troubles and anything may happen round the next corner. There are no hours in the wilderness and no signposts of custom and advisability. There are no bills and telephone calls, no invitations



to answer, engagements to fulfil, markets to watch, trains to catch, no boilers to burst, no necessity of making conversation, and no ends to make meet. The food is so bad that it doesn't matter if it is overcooked. There is no need to mend the rent yesterday's rocks tore in your sleeve, because to-morrow's thorn-forest will certainly make a bigger one. There is so much time in which to say anything, that you put it off till to-morrow, or the next day, and probably never say it at all. In fact, there is nothing to worry about. Of course there is hunger and thirst, death, treachery and elemental nature, but these things are too big to disturb us. It is the petty fears and petty triumphs which destroy us. Happiness is crushed between the things we think we must do and the limitations by which we think we must abide.

## CHAPTER XX

### AN UNDERGROUND PROPHET

**I**T was in Abyssinia that I met the oddest of the odd people who live underground. We had lost our way on the long trek north from Addis Abeba and, somewhere in the Lasta mountains, the head muleteer protested. "I've never seen such country. It is bewitched! On every side there are crops, but no houses and no people. Is it the foxes who cultivate them?"

It was after sunset and we were trudging round a mountain shaped like an octopus. There was no sign of water, or any form of habitation, yet, on each successive ridge, there were neat haystacks, or squares of millet.

At last we camped. The tents faced across a ravine, and in the half-light, with mist drifting into star-rise, the eeriness of the country was exaggerated.

"Perhaps the folk live underground like animals," murmured the guide and, at that moment, a little old man in an enormous white turban popped up on the opposite cliff. His legs were lost in fog, so that he gave no impression of reality.

"It's a spirit," wailed the guide; "it will destroy us."

"Perhaps it knows where there's water," I retorted, and went to investigate.

The gnome-man hardly came up to my shoulder and he went on gathering wood, dead to my questions. When he had sufficient, he trotted off down the gully, still silent, and I followed. We came eventually to a cave, well hidden among boulders and brushwood.

Half a dozen men were seated round a dwindling fire, but none of them spoke. I pulled out some money and they looked at it indifferently. At last one rose and beckoned me into a farther cave lit by a torch. Here crouched the oldest thing I had ever seen and, unexpectedly, it possessed speech, for it asked me my business in Arabic, offering me roasted millet-seed to eat.

"You have been here a long time," I said, struck by the incredible age before me.

"For ever," answered the net of toothless wrinkles, which might have been man, woman or gargyle.

Doubtless I gasped, for the ageless thing continued indifferently. "I have always been here—I shall always be here. It is known."

Eyes which were pits of weariness stared at me for a second, then disappeared beneath lids veined like a vulture's. The man who had brought me, bent suddenly and kissed the ground, then plucked at my sleeve. We went out, followed by a string of orders and the ghost of a movement. I dared not look round. I had a nightmare fear that I would see a heap of bones rattling apart!

Silent figures provided me with water. Others brought rye and grass to our camp, but they would take no money.

Next morning, with the sun shining, I laughed at my superstitions, though the guide still insisted: "They were fox-men, not real."

After an hour's march we met a caravan. "What! You spent the night here? Mary save you!" gulped the merchant-owner. "Did you see the wise man?"

I described my night's adventure. "It is true. He cannot die. My grandfather's grandfather knew him and then he was older than any man's memory."

I wanted to question further, but the merchant,

fingering his amulets, hurried away. "It is not good country," he threw back at us over his shoulder.

The superstition of immortality seems peculiar to cave-dwellers, for, near Garian on the Tripolitanian cliff, there is a troglodyte prophet who claims treble man's usual span. Of course there is always the possibility that such prophets are renewed, like the two Chinese at a club in Port Darwin. Since the earliest memory of the oldest settler there has always been Hong Fu, cook, and Chang Wa, butler. Every decade or so, the invaluable pair return to China on leave and, since no further Chinese immigration is allowed in Australia, only Hong Fu and Chang Wa may come back. Invariably they return, looking just as young as they did fifty or sixty years ago. Are they immortal or are they new editions? The club is much too appreciative of their superlative service to ask such uncomfortable questions.

I rode up to Garian on a winter day when the wind was making sand-devils out of the desert.

The earth looked as if it had been a battle-ground of the ancient gods. It was full of great pits and strewn with boulders which must surely have been the weapons of a primeval struggle. The cliff dropped a sheer thousand feet to a plain sprinkled with lilies and desert broom; but up here, on the edge of the world, where the desolation was lit by a stormy sunset, it was bleak and so cold that I shivered under my sheepskin coat.

"Where is the village?" I asked Abdullah, the tall tribesman who rode with me, and I strained my eyes across the waste in front of us.

"It is under your feet, lady!" he replied, dismounting and looping the tasselled reins over his arm.

I stared more closely at the heaped sand beside the pits, which might have been the hundred shafts of a



once busy colliery. There was no one in sight, yet, all around us, there was movement and sound. My horse nuzzled the ground and snorted. At the same moment a boy appeared beside us, as if he had risen out of the earth.

"Every one of those pits is the court-yard of a house," explained Abdullah, "and below you ten thousand people are living their lives in darkness." A faint savoury smell drifted to our nostrils. "By Allah, they are probably now cooking our dinner!" he added with a laugh.

The sunset was like feathers of orange across the sky. Against this appeared two blots, which resolved themselves into women. It was uncanny the way these people appeared from nowhere.

"Marhaba—welcome! Your coming is good."

The greeting was called to us in sibilant tones, which reminded me of birds in spring, but the women did not move. We went towards them, and, at the sound of our footsteps, they stretched out groping hands and took a few stumbling paces, with fingers fluttering as if to feel their way.

"Are they blind?" I whispered to my tall companion, and then, as I came quite close, the words froze on my lips.

I stared at two faces which looked as if they had long been dead. The light shone on skin that was smooth and leaden, tightly drawn over beautiful small bones. The wind whined, flicking at draperies of indigo and purple, which matched the bruised circles under eyes so enormous that they seemed like black mirrors. Fascinated, I stared at those circles which dyed the cheek bones and crept up beyond the narrow brows.

"Wallah, you are welcome," repeated a soft, high voice. "Come below that we may see you—the light

hurts us." Groping fingers caught me, and I was surprised to find them warm. "I am Selmag, I will guide you."

It was a young voice, I decided, and saw that the women were smiling. Their curved, leaden lips were parted over teeth that, in their whiteness, were the first human, normal thing about a beauty exquisite and yet strange enough to be repulsive.

"This way," crooned Selmag, and stepped into a shaft which opened at our feet. After the first few paces I was stumbling in pitch darkness, but a hand held me firmly, leading me down and down, till I felt I should reach the heart of the earth. The path was smooth and the walls and roof polished to the touch.

"It has to be wide enough for our camels," explained the girl, and then the earth fell away beside me and I heard beasts grunting.

I thought I could distinguish a thicker blackness where all was dark, and two points of light which must be a camel's eyes. Then a door barred our passage, and Selmag opened it with the sureness of clear sight. I fell down a step after her. The tunnel narrowed and twisted sharply, till, suddenly, it debouched into the greyness of a square pit, where hens scuttled away from us and a gazelle stood with one hoof raised.

Blinking, I looked up to where, some hundred feet above us, the sky was still golden and the wind drove the sand in swirls along the edge of the smooth walls which enclosed us. It was very still below, though sound came to us, muffled and far away.

I noticed that the pit was square and each of its faces was pierced by rows of doors, but no windows. From some of them issued smoke and a glimmer of fire. Both women stared at me with their immensely magnified pupils and, here in the dimness, they were wholly beautiful—supple, intangible daughters of

shadow, with their black silken hair loaded with gold ornaments, and the crushed violet which stained nostril and lips to a finer sensitiveness than our common reds could show.

An older woman came noiselessly from the door. "Marhaba," she said, "our desire went to meet you. *He* has been expecting you."

With a little shock I remembered the reason of my journey. Far away in the desert I had heard of the troglodyte village, whose women never saw the light, and whose men earned a hard living by cultivating olives and grain on the plateau, and by hunting gazelle, fox and wolf, to barter their skins with the Bedouin.

Rumour spoke of a famous Sayed, whose lineage was older than that of the ruling Emir, who lived among the troglodytes, but whose face no man had seen. I had never heard his title—if any knew it, they kept the secret—but I was told of his study of that terrible science which can master the unbelieving spirits, the "Ilm el Issm," before whose name the Bedouin tremble.

With the richest presents that could be bought on the coast—bales of silk, a rifle or two and some ornaments of beaten gold—I set out, accompanied by Abdullah and a monosyllabic Bedouin who drove my pack-horses.

In the sunlit plains, where nomad herdsmen followed their camels and goats, the adventure had promised amusement, perhaps even a new thrill. Here, on the threshold of darkness, among women whose speech was inhuman, I shivered a little and wondered if the invisible prophet knew in what spirit I had approached him.

"Ta faddel! Be seated," said the shadow of a voice, and I found myself crouching on a carpet of fox skins, staring across a charcoal fire at the "Mother of all the Earth."

"What are your houses like?" I asked, rolling rice and olive oil into a ball in my palm.

"They are very pleasant, for we have as many rooms as we like. See, the walls are of clay and we decorate them with delicate mouldings. Sometimes we paint them with the yolk of eggs and we hang them with the furs our men bring us."

I learned that there were inner rooms beyond the row leading into the court, and it was in these that the women slept. The upper stories could only be reached by ladders from the central yard, but, for several miles, the earth was tunnelled like a rabbit warren, so that sometimes when a family decided to enlarge its house, it dug through the dwelling of a neighbour, whose front door might be a hundred yards away.

The acrid smoke of the fire got into my eyes, and it seemed to me that I had sat for hours in the low-ceilinged room, eating strange foods full of red pepper.

At last a man's voice sounded from the threshold.

"Greetings, lady—*He* waits for you."

Perhaps it was only my imagination, but I thought that the women grew suddenly tense, and I was conscious of a sigh suppressed as I went out into the pit.

I never saw the face of my guide, but he led me, without faltering, through tunnels whose blackness seemed a tangible thing, across wide spaces where the air was close and fetid, till, at last, we reached a flight of steps.

"Walk with care," he said. "There is a door."

A gust of wind blew in my face and I felt I was in a large room. The hand which had led me was withdrawn. In panic I caught at invisible draperies, but they slipped through my fingers. I heard the door shut behind me.

For a second I knew stark terror. I felt that I



was buried alive, and, instinctively, I put out my hands as if to beat away something that was threatening.

A voice from the farther end of the room spoke to me: "Allah keep you! There is no fear."

The pulses which hammered in my throat grew less painful. There was something infinitely reassuring in that voice, remote and grave. It was a little muffled and I guessed that the speaker wore a veil.

"You have eaten my bread, oh lady. . . ." and I heard the name by which I had long been known in the East, but which neither Abdullah nor anyone on the plateau had heard. "You know our customs and you know that you are safe. Be seated."

I sank down on a pile of furs. How well I knew that measured Arabic, courteous because of the dignity and the force which were the birthright of the speaker. Recognizing at once that it was some great "religious" who was talking, I was horribly ashamed of the futile curiosity which had brought me into his presence.

"Yes," said the voice, as if answering my thoughts, "you have made more useful journeys than this one."

"Sidi," I replied, giving him a prince's title, "may not the seed sown in idleness bear good fruit?"

There was a pause. "What did you come to ask me, for you have deserved well of my race?"

I wondered, since the invisible prophet evidently knew of my work, how much else he knew.

Without waiting for me to speak, he said: "There is a curious blessing with you. Many times this must have been told you, for the Bedouin know these things. Always you are side by side with danger, yet always it is as if one stood between you and harm. It is the will of Allah, but it is a strange thing."

The voice sounded puzzled, before it relapsed into the grave finality of the fatalist. "Your feet will

tread strange roads and they will never be still. At the end you will long for peace, as a woman in travail, but it will not come to you in your own country."

Silence fell and I had an idea that it was like the sea, lapping up and up around me. I felt I was waiting for judgment and there was no doubt in my mind then, nor has there ever been since, that the Sayed knew what the future held for me.

"Each man carries his fate on a ribbon round his neck," he said. "Yours will be very swift and it will come to you in the south by a man's uplifted hand."

I heard my breath coming quickly, for the phrase conjured pictures of violence in the hot, strange lands where life and death are so closely linked that a man scarcely realizes when he passes from one to the other.

"What else did you come to me to ask?" said the voice, so pregnant with wisdom and power.

I dared not mention the wild fantasies I had heard concerning his commerce with spirits, but I faltered some question about this life of darkness and seclusion.

"Your world has need of all its great men," I suggested.

"Do you deny the influence of thought?" he asked.

Later, I realized that I was talking world politics with a man who seemed to know every move of the game. It seemed to me that I was looking at the modern nations through the eyes of all my forefathers, and I interrupted a discourse on the inevitability of what we call progress, with a question which was almost a cry:

"Who are you, Sidi, who are you?"

I imagined that the Sayed rose to his feet, for the answer came from above me.

"I am a servant of Allah. May He give you, after many journeys, peace."

I do not know how long I crouched there, in a room which I knew was empty.

At last someone came to fetch me, and a few steps brought us round a corner into a cavity, not unlike a badger's burrow. I had to crawl through this on my hands and knees; then I was staring across the plateau, where the light was still orange. I wondered how the sunset could have lasted so long, and I looked around puzzled.

The earth was scarred with pit and sandhill. The great cliff dropped behind me to a rose-red plain. A few yards away Abdullah leaned on his rifle beside the horses, and the steel of bit and barrel gleamed in the light. It was the dawn.

The tall figure shrouded in its burnous turned, as a stone rolled from my feet. "Praise be to Allah, you are safe! Mount quickly now; the pack-horses are already on the way."

It was not till we had left the last pit behind that Abdullah asked, casually: "What was He like, oh lady? Did you see His face? They say it is horned like a beast, with eyes of live fire and the tongue of a serpent."

I thought of the grave, quiet voice, instinct with suffering and with something that I did not understand, and I laughed.

"No, I did not see his face," I acknowledged. The shadow of a branch flickered across the way. It looked like a brandished weapon, and I shivered as I remembered the phrase, spoken in darkness: "It will come to you in the south by a man's uplifted hand."

For three days we rode across the plain, and I was glad when I saw the first Italian fort. The officers chaffed me about my visit to the prophet, but there was an undercurrent of seriousness.

"How long has he lived underground?" I asked.

The commandant shrugged jovial shoulders. "There has always been someone down there; but no one has even seen him."

"Not even his own people?" I asked, and felt we were speaking in italics.

"No, or, at least, they won't acknowledge it. He knows everything that's going on—sends us information sometimes. His intelligence service is A.I."

There was a pause. "What is his name?" I asked.

The commandant shifted spurred heels. "He has no name. No one even knows where he came from."

I shivered, in spite of shut windows and blazing stove. A young captain leaned forward. "It's the last of the miracles," he said. "He can tell you things," he hesitated, "the sort of things no one but yourself ought to know."

"Bastante, enough!" commanded the major; "we'll play bridge."



## CHAPTER XXI

### A NIGHT OF TERROR

FOR a few months in the spring of 1920, Damascus provided enough thrills to satisfy the welter of special correspondents and secret service agents, who pooled information about plots, raids and bargains in an Arab café, kept by a Greek, where the waiter was an Armenian, the clients Kurds, Syrian and an occasional Bedou, the spasmodic music Turkish, and the coffee Egyptian.

"Thrills!" exclaimed a reporter, whose name was—well, let us say "Marshall"—and whose paper was of the meteoric variety. "They just don't happen for me any longer."

I stared at the little man whose sandy insignificance was so out of keeping with his reputation.

"You must have had an interesting life," I suggested doubtfully.

"Not at all. Revolutions and earthquakes are as commonplace to me as bus rides to you."

"Are you expecting either in Damascus just at the moment?" I queried in as respectful a tone as I could assume.

"Goodness, no! The most we can hope for is a massacre." The colourless eyes looked at me without the least twinkle to belie their seriousness. "This place has a steel door which they can let down like a portcullis, so you'll be perfectly safe."

I smiled over the fragment of conversation as I went upstairs to my over-furnished room, where three

couches covered with carpets and a plethora of inlaid tables gave the impression of a warehouse. From the windows, set so high in the wall that I had to climb on one of the beds to look out of them, the city seemed painted in silver amidst the indigo of her apricot gardens. The moonlight was so clear that I went to sleep dreaming I was sailing on a white, still sea.

Suddenly a storm arose and I was deafened by the roar of the waves. I woke in the hot, stuffy room, but thought I was still dreaming, for clamour echoed around me. At first I could not place the direction from which it came.

Then, as the tumult grew more insistent, I climbed up on the pillows and tried to force open the hermetically sealed windows. The darkness outside was opaque. It seemed to have a curiously stifling quality, and I wondered what time the moon had set. Waves of sound beat against my ears. There was something familiar about the intermittent crackling. In a flash I was back in France, bent over the wheel of an ambulance, where just such sound eddied between the blurred headlights. "Rifle fire!" I exclaimed, and my heart missed a beat with excitement.

"Marshall must be enjoying himself," I thought, and wondered if I could turn on my light, or whether I should at once become a target for whoever was conducting the massacre. From far away came the sound of Maxims, and I speculated as to which side the soldiers were taking and who were the victims.

Footsteps sounded in the passage and the light went up to reveal the oddest figure. For a second I did not recognize my journalist acquaintance. The little man, who looked more like a white rabbit than ever, was garbed in pyjamas so much too large for him that a couple of vivid red-and-white stripes were sufficient to eclipse him.

"Get up at once," ordered my visitor. "There's a general rising in the town. Fugitives are pouring into the hotel in the hope that the door will be bullet-proof."

A violent crash came from below.

"That's it now. For God's sake, be quick. What are you waiting for?"

I looked at the curious figure in front of me, while my mind raced over the various possibilities of escape. If there was going to be slaughter, it would be thickest in the crowded hall below, where probably every malefactor, justly afraid of his doom, had by this time taken refuge.

"What is the use of getting up?" I asked grimly. "I am much safer here. If there really is a massacre, it's only a question of time before they break in, and they'll murder everyone in the hall; but they will be too interested in looting to go through every bedroom in this rabbit-warren."

The clamour was coming nearer. There were wild shouts and bursts of song outside. Torchlight flared across the ceiling, paling the electricity. The journalist made a last appeal. "I can't leave you alone here. Please get up."

"Oh, do leave me——" I wailed, my throat rather dry—there was an unpleasantly animal quality about the tumult which must have been almost below the windows.

I decided that an unfrequented bathroom would be the safest refuge—there is nothing to excite cupidity in a battered iron tub, while, between this and the wall, there would be sufficient space for a temporary asylum.

The journalist was evidently torn between his sense of duty to a lone countrywoman and the professional instincts which urged him to profit by the experience. It was impossible to remain in an obstinate woman's

bedroom, when his paper would revel in an "eye-witness's" account of the horrors in street and market. His eyes wandered to the pen and ink on one of the inlaid tables and the habits of a life-time prevailed. He turned to the door, tripping over the dusty carpet he carried.

"What on earth have you got there?" I called after him, realizing at last the whole incongruity of the picture.

"I believe it is a genuine Ispahan," Marshall replied, with dignity. "I spent a fortnight bargaining for it and I'm not going to have it looted."

During a lull in the clamour outside, he touched the carpet with loving fingers and, at the same moment, appeared to wonder what his hair looked like. He tried to smooth it with the hand that held the revolver. I watched its gyrations, fascinated.

Suddenly the light went out and the revolver went off. Deliberately I crawled under the bed.

"Don't move," said the journalist in a voice which sounded remarkably assured. "I'll find the light."

"I don't believe there is any," I retorted, in tones muffled by the accumulated dust of my refuge. "The electricity was probably switched off at the main."

The journalist literally snorted, while an "eye-witness's" lurid sentences flashed through his brain.

Nothing happened for a few minutes. We waited tensely, while footsteps raced down the street. It was very dusty under the bed, and, at last, curiosity conquered my sense of discretion. Cautiously, I crept from my hiding-place and began fumbling for matches.

"What are you doing?" came Marshall's voice, and I remembered the revolver whose close proximity filled me with more anxiety than any amount of "noises off."



"For heaven's sake, keep still," I had to shout to make myself heard above the sudden roar outside. There was a sound of plaster falling. I shivered in my chiffon nightgown and groped for something to cover it.

"Good God, they must be on the roof. Can't you get those matches?"

A tiny flame spurted, and, between us, we found and lit a tallow dip. Gazing at my smeared face above its flicker, Marshall regained his pose. "Stay here," he said. "I'll go out and reconnoitre."

As soon as the slither of his heel-less slippers had faded down the passage, I flung myself on the door and locked it.

It was scarcely ten minutes since Marshall had burst into the room, and the firing was violent but spasmodic. There was certainly no organized battle, but I could distinguish clearly the rattle of Maxims coming from the direction of the barracks. For a few minutes I clung to the window-bars, puzzled at the inertia of the crowd. Then, with appalling suddenness, the street was alive with gesticulating figures. The passion of the mob seemed to scorch me as I swayed above them. In the midst of a seething chaos, one poor wisp of humanity struggled. For an instant its beard and its turban eddied above the savage hands which clutched it, flung it about, dragged it down.

"Dog of an infidel!" The words were screeched by a youth who foamed at the mouth, and, with a roar, the crowd followed his lead, till it seemed as if even the stones of the houses echoed the insult.

A few yards away there was a signpost and towards this surged the mob, but it was a minute or two before my brain took in what was going to happen. The flaring torches made the scene unreal and it seemed

to me that the whole crowd writhed and howled round what looked devilishly like a gallows. The arm of the post stretched black against the flames and I saw something like a snake slip up and over it.

There was a wilder cry from the very heart of the mob, and it was as if a solitary figure had been vomited from the maw of some great beast. For a second I saw the torn robes, the bound limbs, above a mass of upturned faces. Then I understood. Crashing my bare hands through the panes I shrieked curses and prayers, which were drowned in the thunder of raucous voices. I wrenched at the bars—dragged at the unyielding bricks, forgetting that I was in the circle of darkness beyond the torches. There was a horrid jerk and the human bundle swung out like a puppet dancing on a string.

At last I must have slept, my shoulder leaning against the bed, a tablecloth wound round my knees, for I remember nothing more till I saw the dawn pale through the shattered panes and realized there was silence.

Somebody banged on the door. A cool voice remarked: "I thought you might like some coffee. The hotel is rather disarranged this morning."

"Disarranged?" I stuttered, as I unlocked the door. "Is anyone left alive?"

The special correspondent smiled. "What a lot of emotion you waste," he said. "Of course, everyone is alive, except a miserable money-lender whom the crowd hanged in a cheerful desire to get some of its own back."

I shivered as I remembered the last horror of the night. "But the massacre—I don't understand?"

"There was no massacre. It was an eclipse, and the Arabs thought it was a whale eating the moon." The journalist's expression was cynical.

I was too bewildered to speak, so, rubbing a fresh ink-spot on his finger, Marshall continued:

"The whole town got drunk with noise and they wasted six months' ammunition on the sky. A few bullets went wide, but no damage was done, and, eventually, you see, the whale was killed, for the moon appeared again, safe and sound."

"Nobody was hurt?" I repeated, parrot-like, my eyes fixed on the ink-spot, for I was wondering how much paper "an eye-witness" had wasted before he discovered the explanation of the night's turmoil.

"Oh, no, nobody hurt except the money-lender, who was doubtless in need of a hanging."

## CHAPTER XXII

### A SHEIKH'S HAREM

**W**HILE Damascus was torn by political intrigue, the Syrian plains and the great desert beyond the Hauran were as peaceful as they had ever been since the first nomads raided the first settlers. Accompanied by a wakil (bailiff) of Nouri Sha-alan, paramount chief of the Ruwalla; a henchman of King Feisul's who was very beautiful and knew it; an American driver and half a dozen Bedouins who used the second car as a convenient means of hunting gazelle, I set forth to pay my visit to Palmyra and its sheikh.

All day long we drove in an armoured car across the desert. Towards sunset the land swelled into faint waves and ridges, whose shadows were magnified in pools of mirage.

"We are very near the village," said our Bedouin guide. "Allah grant that they do not take us for strangers and kill us."

The New Jersey chauffeur smiled. "I guess Americans don't die as easily as all that," he said cheerfully.

"But, alas, I am not an American."

The man looked at me amused. "I guess I never heard of a woman dying before an American either," he remarked.

One of the Arab guard interposed: "Let my friend put on a kufiya to show that he is one of us," he suggested.



The chauffeur submitted to being disguised in a cream-coloured head-dress, the end of which he wound about his mouth so that only his good-humoured blue eyes distinguished him from his companions. He threw in the clutch quickly. "We'll have to move some," and the car leaped at the desert as if it were a live thing to be devoured.

The sky was molten as we approached Palmyra and we saw the old Turkish castle as a fantastic etching against a sheet of flame.

Where the hills narrowed to a pass, black tents were scattered among a herd of camels. A woman rode by on a donkey, a child in her arms, and I was reminded of the Flight into Egypt.

A moment later I had my first glimpse of the city of Zenobia. Palmyra, famous in the days of Aurelian, who defeated her queen, is a golden ruin, and the sunset lit each arch and pillar, and dyed rose-red the sands of that immortal caravan route to Baghdad. From the temple of Baal stole dark-robed women with orange flowers in their hair. The boulders came suddenly to life and showed figures in earth-brown mantles, their rifles ready, for this was a year of war, when all Syria fought for her independence in defiance of European treaties.

"We are from the Sherif. Allah keep you," shouted the Bedouin, Abdulla.

The hostile murmurs died and we were led into a fortified khan whose main room overlooked the yard, where camels lay beside their scarlet saddles. The floor was strewn with carpets and sheepskins. "God make you strong—you are welcome," sounded from the shadows.

The dust of a long journey caked in my throat, so a man, whose gravity was in keeping with the length of his beard, brought me a bowl of curdled goat's milk

and a water-pipe with a mouthpiece of amber. We talked of Arab politics till a message came from the sheikh summoning us to his house.

In moonlight we stumbled between blind walls skirting date gardens, ankle-deep in sand, until we came to the threshold of Mohammed, son of Saoud, of the lineage of the Prophet, lord of 5,000 desert horsemen and beneficent despot of Palmyra.

For a moment I thought we had chanced upon the village school, for a crowd of elfin children swarmed in the court, but the warrior who guided us, announced that they were the offspring of our host.

He led us into a room where an old man lay on a pile of mattresses in a corner. His swords, rifles and pipe-stems hung on the wall behind him, and, before him, stood a brazier with pots of bitter coffee, from which a slave poured mouthfuls for his guests. His voice was weak, and sweat poured from his skin.

"I believe it's 'flu,' and all my quinine is in the back of beyond," I murmured.

"Take no notice," warned Abdulla. "Would you tell a lion when it is sick?"

Meekly I went forward to crouch on the striped mats beside the sheikh. "Allah give you many sons," he greeted me, and began to talk of war. "Man is born to fight and woman to work," he said. "So it was written before your time or mine."

From outside came the groans of camels as they jerked, protesting, to their knees, and the clatter of dishes where hidden women cooked supper. Inside it was very still, except for the rustle of coarse garments as, one by one, the headmen slipped in and ranged themselves in a circle, silent after their first dignified greeting.

The sheikh's voice strengthened as his audience increased, and he raised himself on an arm, so that his

great bulk showed beneath the tautened folds of his burnous. "A youth has but one chance to prove his manhood and that is a raid. The warrior whose face has been whitened<sup>1</sup> will not lack for a bride. By Allah, if a man does not love his rifles better than his pipes, his women hang a haik over his door and call him a virgin."

The eyes of the old man burned in hollows worn by wind and sun, and darkened by smeared kohl. He forgot his fever and there was something wild and unrestrained in the sudden movement which left him leaning against a camel-saddle covered with sheepskins.

"It is good that you have come, for, when a man talks with a friend, he finds a mirror by which he may see his own mind. Here in the desert we rarely speak—there is so much time for words that a man puts off speech till to-morrow or next week."

"Thoughts are more profitable than words," I suggested.

"The truth is with you," returned the sheikh. "We have a saying: 'First think, then act: there is no necessity for speech.'"

"Your actions have been swords," I remarked politely.

My host's face was immobile and his eyes fixed. Only his hand moved as he lifted a long-stemmed narghile. "A man is responsible for his women, his family, his tribe; and his word is as strong as the rifles which back it, as swift as his horsemen. When I was young there was no corner of the deserts uncrossed by my raiders," he said. "Now my camels grow fat." Silence crept into the room like a tangible presence.

<sup>1</sup> To whiten a man's face means to proclaim his valour in public after a battle.

A scent of herbs and incense made the air heavy.

"I must sleep," I whispered at last to Abdulla, but the Bedouin was unresponsive.

"You can't," he said. "Do you not admire the mirrors? They are very beautiful and they came from Paris."

I looked up at the fly-spotted gimcrack glasses so out of keeping with the saddlery and weapons which surrounded them.

The sheikh's glance followed mine. "Once I had a French wife and I lived with her in Paris till she died, but you will see her daughter to-night. I brought back many trifles from France, but it was long ago and the women have taken most of them."

"How did you like Paris?" I asked.

Mohammed, the red one, so called because of his great hennaed beard, was evidently divided between his desire to impress his liegemen and his honest opinion that Europe, noisy, crowded and expensive, was a much overrated place.

"Whenever I walked in the streets," he said, "there was someone who desired that I should ride. 'It will be quick, it will save time,' they said, and I answered, 'Allah reward you, but I am not in a hurry.' Certainly you have many possessions in the West, but you are afraid."

I looked up surprised.

"You of the West fear death as our women fear childlessness. Many marvels you have done in your country, but we have our Faith and we fear nothing but Allah."

The sheikh, nicknamed "the Blade," because when his name was mentioned "a man felt the strength of his neck between his shoulder blades," spoke with the simplicity of a child. "You have many opinions and you go here and there like an insect scurrying in search



of it knows not what, but we have convictions. You say you cannot wait and so you waste yourselves. Allah gave us patience."

The voice, monotonous and assured, drifted into stillness. The lanterns flickered and sent strange shadows across the room. I felt my eyelids drooping again and I began to wonder if they were real, these motionless figures, wrapped in camel's-hair robes, their chests bare beneath their cartridge belts, their faces darker than the brown hoods which framed them.

Suddenly boys came in, bearing brass ewers full of rose water, which they poured over the guests' hands. They were followed by Arabs, their rifles still across their shoulders, silver-hilted daggers in their girdles, who placed huge dishes before us, and, a minute later, we had all set to work on a sheep roasted whole.

We ate rapidly, tearing choice portions off the carcass with our finger-nails. The men made guttural noises indicative of appreciation. From far away came the sound of firing. One man rose silently.

"It may be that it is those raiders of el Hamed's. What brings them so near the village?" said his neighbour, as he went out into the night.

The intermittent firing receded into the distance, while the sheikh talked in the same way, using the same words, as men of his race had done, in black tent or mud-walled dwelling, for 3,000 years. He did not interrupt a sentence when a messenger appeared in the doorway, his burnous stained with blood. "Salaam aleikum, son of my brother, what is your news?" he asked at last, and something swift and fierce flashed between the two men.

"Aleikum es salaam," came the answer. "The news is good," and there was no more talk till the new-comer had been served with bitter coffee. Then

the sheikh rose with unexpected swiftness and took my arm. "This is not women's work," he said. "Come, I will introduce you to my house," and led me to where a throng of women whispered round an open door. "Allah bless your sleep," he murmured, and left me in a room carpeted with rugs from Bokhara, hung with gilt Birmingham mirrors, and furnished with an enormous couch on which hard quilts were piled one upon another.

I was just wondering whether it would be possible to sleep on top of them, as they seemed not to have been disturbed for years, when the sheikh's wives trooped in and sat down on the floor, evidently prepared to watch my movements. There were a dozen of them, of all ages and races. The oldest was white-haired and shrivelled. The youngest, a child of thirteen with apple cheeks, was expecting her first baby. I looked into grey eyes, brown eyes, dark-rimmed, marvellous green eyes and wondered how to begin a conversation.

Abdulla's voice came from outside. "Sayeda, have you all your desires?"

"No," I answered firmly, "I want a bath."

Footsteps crunched across the yard and returned more slowly. The women giggled and pulled their robes of indigo and scarlet across their faces. A bowl like a large breakfast cup was pushed through the door, with a murmured, "All we have is yours," and I was left staring at the exquisite damascened brass of my "bath."

Timidly I refused the crone's offer of a brush which showed signs of baldness—due to age rather than use, I imagine, since Arab women prefer combs made of wood—and, having removed my outer garments, I slipped as unobtrusively as possible *on* to, not *into* the bed

There was a sigh of disappointment among the audience, but no movement. Gingerly, for fear of disturbing the insect life of the bed, I sat up and made an appropriate speech: "May your life be peaceful, as the land your master rules."

Eyes young with hope, tired with age, mystic with motherhood, gazed at me expectantly and, suddenly, I realized that I was expected to invite some of the harem to share my couch. The choice was wide. While I struggled with a certain embarrassment, a few words of execrable French uttered by the owner of the bluest eyes reminded me of my host's romance when he had accompanied a Syrian mission to Paris. I beckoned to the speaker to share the repose which I felt would be troubled.

"You are sweet, so sweet," she said as she curled up beside me, "and to-morrow I will give you a paste that will make you fat, so fat that a man will give many camels for you."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### ADVENTURE BY NIGHT

SO many adventures insist on happening at night—in fact the tale of any journey is but a record of nights disturbed—and I have always had a childish objection to being woken in the smallest hours.

Some time ago a Settlement in need of funds invited various celebrities to speak, for five minutes each, on "What I most object to." A famous general objected, seriously, to apathy. An enchanting actress objected that the moderns were too lazy to object to anything. The chairman objected to chairmen.

When my turn came, I suggested, frivolously, that there were few things more disagreeable than being suddenly wrenched out of the dream in which you are accepting the crown of Ruritania, or riding a comet across the best hunting-line, or exploring the last blank space on the map. The audience smiled, but I am sure most of them visualized an eiderdown slipping off, or a late guest stumbling up to bed.

I was thinking of crabs, corpses, and hyenas; of a suicide, an amorous porcupine, and a journalistic massacre; of salt-junks, ghosts, and an axe under the door; of all the adventures, grave and gay, that have disturbed my nights.

Here are some of them.

Once, in Western Arabia, I was travelling as an Egyptian lady destined for an elusive harem of the interior, so the village sheikhs received me amiably. I



used to sleep in the women's hut, and they were always much amused by my tales of Egypt. When my Arabic was exhausted, we lay down as close-packed as sardines and prepared to sleep.

The Bedouins removed the stained veils from their heads, wrapped them round their feet, and slumbered, boneless as cocoons. The heat and the smell were generally indescribable.

One night, when my fellow-sardines were restless, I felt I could bear it no longer. Taking my blanket, I crept cautiously to the door. The yard was flooded with moonlight, and a hut against the opposite fence appeared invitingly empty. I peered through the doorway and saw a solitary figure rolled in a striped silk sheiba, fast asleep. Probably a bride, I thought, for a strong, sweet scent drifted from the hut. I stepped over the recumbent figure, rolled myself up in the corner and went to sleep.

I don't know why I woke. Starlight powdered the floor. Nothing moved. I stared at the girl who lay so still, and, gradually, a prickly sensation crept up my spine, for I realized that I could not hear her breathing.

For a few minutes I crouched against the mud wall. Then, summoning all my resolution, I approached the motionless figure and lifted the sheiba.

I had been sleeping with a corpse prepared for burial. The scent came from the death herbs stuck in a gash in the girl's chest.

I remember a series of eventful nights when I was wandering round the world by tramp steamer and river junk with a girl as adventurous as myself. In China we tried to do a seven-hundred-mile inland journey between the armies of North and South. Hidden in the ammunition wagon of a native troop-train, we escaped, passportless, from a determined consul at

Canton. In company with a dozen sweating soldiers and a prisoner, whose hands were tied to his pigtail, we arrived at Shui-Chow, the railhead.

A kindly wolfram buyer, the only European in the place, sheltered us, but his house was strictly native, so we slept on polished wooden opium couches.

The first night was interrupted by a thunderous knock on the door. Undine and I stared at each other. The wolfram buyer reassured us as he hurried to the door.

"It's probably a message from the governor. He generally sends for me at night, as foreigners are not particularly popular."

It appeared that His Excellency was seriously alarmed. There was a rumour—one among a thousand—that a huge band of brigands was meditating attack. How could Shui-Chow, a labyrinth of foul courts and alleys crowded on the river bank, be best defended? The wolfram buyer suggested that the two hills which commanded the town should be occupied at once, but the governor demurred at risking his soldiers in the open.

"Might they not get hurt?" he asked with anxiety.

A few nights later we crept out of Shui-Chow while the guard was being changed. The wolfram buyer insisted on accompanying us. In pitch darkness we felt our way along the outer wall, then turned across country. Eventually we reached a salt-junk filched from the Southern army.

For twenty-four hours we poled up-stream.

At 2 a.m. on the second night we passed through a gorge and anchored where the river widened between flowering thickets. The coolies went ashore. We slept.

I remember even now that I was in the middle of a perfect dream when Undine shook me.

"What's the matter?" I muttered.

"Listen! Don't you hear something?" A shot echoed in the mountains.

"No, nothing unusual," I retorted crossly. Undine tightened her grip on my shoulder.

"Wait," she ordered.

I was just wondering if I could recapture my dream, when a wail drifted across the water. It was the most eerie sound in the world and I felt my scalp tingling. The cry was repeated, and answered by a long-drawn moan from our side of the river.

"Oh, my God! It's coming nearer!"

Forcibly, I dragged Undine out of the hutch. The junk was deserted, but there was a glimmer of fire among the bushes. Another wail echoed against the rocks.

Something white moved on the cliff face. In desperation we crossed the plank, felt the earth squelch under us, pushed through trailing branches and almost fell into the coolies' camp.

The interpreter, who looked like a penguin in his black silk coat and white trousers, was smoking by the fire.

"What on earth is that?" I gasped, as a wail seemed to rise out of the ground at our feet. The plump little Cantonese was unmoved.

"There has been a battle. You heard the rifles this evening. Now the women have come out to look for the dead. They cry to keep away the evil spirits." He moulded the pellet at the end of his pipe. "It may be that you can hear the ghosts answering," he said. We went back to the boat and stopped our ears, while the cries lingered, ebbed, and faded into the dawn.

The only time I've ever heard anything as ghoulish was in a superlative tourist resort in the Canadian

Rockies. It was at Glacier, where a perfect hotel stands way back from the railway line, at the edge of the woods. When we arrived the hotel was full, but the manager could not resist Undine's smile. He led us to a "single room with bath," gave us the key, and left us.

"One of us must sleep on the floor," said Undine mournfully.

"Well, you can have the mattress and I'll lie on the springs," I retorted.

Then we went to the station to retrieve our luggage. A girl in Salvation Army costume was sobbing on a bench. Uncomfortably, we inquired the reason. It was simple. There was no room at the hotel. She would have to sit on the platform for twelve hours until the next train went out about 3 a.m. Regretfully, we took charge of her, gave her dinner, and offered her a slice of our room.

Eventually, Undine and the mattress were arranged on the floor. I balanced on the springs, which were remarkably tense. The Salvation Army lass was given the pillow and blankets, with which she made a couch in the bath. It was arranged that she should creep away without disturbing us to catch her train. We lent her an alarm clock, shut the door to muffle its insistence, and slept.

We were awakened by the most appalling yelp from the bathroom. Undine gave one leap on to the middle of the bed and me. Breathless, we waited. Another frantic yowl pierced the night and the same awful thought struck us both—we had been reading the same ghostly story.

"It wasn't a woman at all," gasped Undine.

"No," I agreed, "it must have been a werewolf!"

The electric switch was near the door. There was a short struggle as to who should turn it on. I was the stronger, so I pushed Undine off the bed.



We felt braver in the light. Still horrifying sounds came through the unlatched bathroom door. Gingerly we pushed it open. The white-tiled cubicle was empty, and a glance at the clock showed us that it was nearly four. Obviously our visitor had crept silently away an hour ago, to catch her train. There was a dollar and a pathetic little note on the chair.

Undine and I looked at each other while another wail echoed through the room. Then we noticed that the window was open. Outside it, his nose about two feet from the sill—have I mentioned that the room was on the ground floor, backing on to the pines?—was an enormous porcupine howling at the moon.

One of the worst nights I ever spent was in the Australian blue-gum country. I was riding cheerfully from one station to another, with a great deal of imagination and little local knowledge. My last host indicated the trail, which was only a sense of direction, and told me to keep "straight on till I hit Rankin's boundary." All day I guided myself by the sun; but sunset found me nowhere near anyone's boundary, and, when the stars came out, I lost all sense of direction and rode in circles.

My horse suddenly took charge. He was "all in," but he smelt a bush fire before I saw its flicker. He made for it.

A surprised young man in a check shirt roused himself from his cooking. He asked me "where the spotted hell" I was going, and, after a glance at my horse, offered me a share of his supper and all his blankets.

That night was rather fun. The boundary rider had not seen anything more human than a cockatoo for a month, and he talked, pipe in mouth, slouch hat glued to his head.

In the morning he showed me how to make a puffaloon—hot, yeastless bread—turned me firmly in the direction from which I thought I'd come, and opined that even a female could not miss the wire. My horse seemed less certain of it, but, as he persistently followed his own inclination, in due course we reached the station. It consisted of a two-roomed Noah's Ark house, with a galvanized iron roof and a veranda, set among sheds and railed-in paddocks.

My host was known throughout Australia as "the Beetle," for all his features were squashed into horny flatness. He had a nice wide smile. With him was a man so thin and dry that he looked as if he had been passed through a mangle.

There was only one bedroom, which was given to me, and after supper we turned on an old-fashioned gramophone and danced in riding-boots on the sitting-room oilcloth.

At the end of a week my host and his friend decided to ride into the nearest township and "blue" a month's earnings. They would return the following night. "Blueing a cheque" means throwing the slip of paper that represents the whole of your wages on to the counter, and asking the barman to tell you when you have drunk its equivalent.

Before leaving, "the Beetle" approached me diffidently. It appeared that the barman always sent them home with a last bottle of whisky in their pockets, so that, when they arrived at the station, it was unlikely he would remember the bedroom was occupied. He would be sure to make blindly for his usual couch. As there was no key, would I mind wedging an axe under the door? I promised.

The following night I was awakened by a terrific crash in the sitting-room, so I withdrew the axe and went out to investigate. There were three men

there, and the stranger was in the last stages of despair.

"He would mix his drinks," explained my host, "and now he wants to be a suicide." The stranger muttered incoherently. I suggested strong coffee.

"The Beetle" blundered out to make it. The long and dry one went on to the veranda to erect a third camp-bed. I turned my back on the stranger and, in that moment, he whipped out a razor. His attempt at cutting his throat was not effective, but it was incredibly messy. While we were bandaging him, I thought his head was going to fall off backwards.

As soon as we had laid him on a bed, "the Beetle" procured a fresh horse and set off, quite amiably, to ride fifty miles for the nearest doctor. I thought it was waste of energy, for we couldn't stop the bleeding.

We sat down in two very hard chairs. In a few minutes my companion was asleep. How abominably callous, I thought, and followed his example! Dawn woke us. The "suicide" was gone.

Indignantly, we searched the house. The dried-up one opined that the man was "foxing."

"Don't be an idiot," I protested. "We saw the cut." My companion was not very certain what he had seen.

We were in the middle of a furious argument when news came that a stranger had been found in the creek. According to the excited messenger, his head was only kept on by a bandage and he had contrived to drown himself in two feet of water.

Hyenas and camels have been the worst disturbers of my nights. Ghosts have come in a pretty good second.

When I was trekking through Abyssinia we used to heel-rope the mules near our tents, and all would be well till the hyenas wanted their supper. Then howls

and snorts brought us tumbling out of our fleabags. Generally the mules broke loose and stampeded over the tent-ropes. Always the natives seized their rifles and fired into the blue. No amount of repetition would convince them that they were not being attacked by brigands. Of course, they never killed a hyena.

When camels run amok it is more serious. A few years ago I crossed the Libyan Desert disguised as a Bedouin. I had a caravan of seventeen natives with about twenty camels. When spring came the males acquired the syring (mating) goitre. They blew unpleasant-looking glands out of their mouths and roared like bulls of Bashan. The only safe place was on their backs, for they were completely oblivious of anything in their way.

One moonlight night two great beasts broke their agalls—the nooses which double up the foreleg under the knee. Their bellowing brought me out of my tent, inadequately attired. The night seemed full of vast, heaving shapes. Two loose camels crashed past me and I had just time to fling myself into the middle of a very prickly bush.

There was a surge of monstrous humps, as every animal struggled to its feet and, on three legs, hobbled blindly through the camp. Tents went down. Saddles splintered. One beast fell over a folding-bed and lay roaring amidst the wreckage. We spent the rest of the night catching those abominable animals, and they (not we!) were so tired next day that we had to cut short the march.

All over the world the natives in my various caravans have had encounters with the local brand of ghost.

In Abyssinia I myself spent a distracted night on account of the activities of—well, I do not quite know what. I had insisted on pitching the tents under a



grove of umbrella-topped mimosas. My followers objected to the proximity of a Moslem cemetery. As Coptic Christians, they were convinced that "ghosts" haunted the tombs of the infidels. I refused to move the camp because the spot provided a rare combination of shade, water and grazing. Before going to bed, i.e., putting on a few woollies over my breeches and sweater, and creeping into a triple fleabag, I explored the cemetery. It was enclosed by a low wall. The tombs were covered with stones, and in one corner was a small "death hut," or mortuary. Satisfied that nothing human lurked therein, I returned to my tent and slept.

I was awakened at midnight by repeated knocking. Extremely annoyed, I shouted to the soldiers:

"Stop that hammering!"

There was no answer to my shout, so I plunged out of the tent. It was an eerie night. Moonlight splintered through the branches of the mimosas. Wind creaked in the trees, and two birds called to each other in queer rising notes which broke like a sob.

Except for the knocking, the camp was unnaturally still. I stalked across to the first tent. It was empty. There was no need to look inside the second, for the canvas flapped wide. Very slowly, I turned towards the cemetery and my feet seemed to belong to someone else.

Just as I reached the wall, a white bundle rose, apparently from out of the ground, and flung itself, shrieking, across my legs.

When my heart had fallen into its normal place, I realized that it was my groom, wrapped in an earth-stained chamma, with every amulet possessed by the caravan hung round his neck.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

It appeared that everyone else had taken refuge in the village.

"It is an evil place," gibbered my groom, "but I could not allow the nagadi's mules to eat all the grain."

"What is the meaning of this noise?" I asked. The knocking sounded as if it came from the other side of the wall.

The Abyssinian explained, in the voice of a parent speaking to a foolish child.

"It is the spirits of the unbelieving dead. They are beating at the lids of their coffins, but they can never get out."

I shivered. "Go to the village," I ordered. "I myself will look after the horses."

As a matter of fact, I fastened myself into the tent, lit every lantern I could find, and sat up listening. The knocking faltered. Sometimes it died away altogether. With the false dawn came a despairing burst and I could imagine the wood breaking. Then it stopped.

Midnight troubles are not necessarily confined to the wilderness. In America I had been lecturing to a very learned society in a very frivolous frock. After a discussion concerning magnetic variation, artificial horizons and the origin of the Touareg, the mayor, a genial person, offered to drive me home. His wife suggested that they should make a slight detour, in order that I might see the city from a special viewpoint in the park.

We sped up and round till we reached a platform, from which the lights on Main Street were like an avenue of stars. The mayor had just opened the front window and begun a summary of industrial development, when a police-car arrived. It swept a half-circle, blazed its headlights over us, and an official voice bellowed: "No petting after 11.30!"

The mayor's indignation was shattering.

An episode that equally enraged me happened in Toledo. I had spent four nights on sleeping-cars, which

are the least perfect things in America. In between, I had delivered half a dozen lectures, been interviewed by countless reporters, attended innumerable mass lunches and dinners, after which I was always expected to speak brilliantly and at length. In fact I was worn out.

An American lecture tour is a harder proposition than any amount of desert travelling, and I sighed with relief when I found one perfect night before me. I could get eight hours' sleep. Of course I did not. I was too over-tired. I kept adding up, in my mind, all the things I had to do to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that. By 2 a.m. I had decided there was not a blank spot for weeks. An hour later, by sheer will-power and the monotony of counting, not sheep but engagements, I had achieved sleep. Then the telephone bell rang. It was 4 a.m. I stumbled out of bed, wondering how many entirely different aches composed my body, and a sweet-voiced clerk politely asked me to lock my door. Words failed me. I contemplated tearing the telephone off the wall, or throwing the furniture out of the window. Instead I merely stuttered inarticulate wrath. The sweet-voiced clerk repeated her request. I put down the receiver very gently and swore in every language that I knew.

When I was writing the life of the Moorish brigand and sherif, Raisuli, I lived in his camp in the Ahmas Mountains. His tents were pitched on a cliff at the edge of the forest, but he was in telephonic communication with Tetuan. The day I arrived I was taken to see that telephone as if it had been the Delphic oracle. Sheikhs and warriors regarded it with the greatest awe, and its priest, a half-caste, received some of the veneration due to the instrument, which he alone could control.

Nobody ever thought of using it, so there was

intense excitement when, one night, the bell rang so violently that the half-caste was frightened to touch it. He stared at the whirring hammers, then fled through the camp, shrieking an alarm. I tumbled out of my tent, wrapped in a camel blanket. Men seized their rifles.

When the telephonist had been kicked into coherence, he was led back to his instrument. The bell was still ringing. A Spanish voice came over the wire and the half-caste translated between his gasps:

"There is a riot in Tetuan. Murder! The civilians have got out their rifles. Loot! Are the hill tribes concentrating? The town is not prepared for attack!"

Somebody ran to waken Raisuli.

"Why bring me these child's tales?" he asked.

The slave persisted—had not the instrument of magic spoken?

Raisuli's face darkened. Prophet, warrior and statesman, he was a profound judge of men.

"Go, tell the Spaniards," he said, "that, while I live, no hillman will set foot in Tetuan." He heaved on to his side. "It is probably a few robbers in the bazaars," he added over a shoulder the size of an ox.

By the way, after writing this chapter, I am not quite so certain that I hate being woken up in the middle of the night. Adventure is great fun—afterwards.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### ADVENTURES IN PROPRIETY

**P**ROPRIETY is a geographical feature, its latitude a curve between what we reveal and what we leave to the imagination, between the beads of the South Sea Islander and the furs of the Eskimo.

I was once riding along the Indian frontier, in the wake of a camel caravan, whose owner was so jealous of his wives that they looked like bundles of merchandise. "One of these women is supposed to be very beautiful," murmured my guide, "but which it is I shall never know. If she so much as uncovered an eyelid her master would kill her." Hours passed. A motor chugged up from a hill-station. The camel train objected. One beast did more. It kicked with so many legs and so violently that its rider lost her seat. Her voluminous skirts caught on the pommel and she appeared to turn inside out, like an umbrella. For one terrible moment she hung suspended from her shoulders, in her birthday garments, nothing hidden but her head.

"What will happen to her?" I gasped, when the commotion had subsided and the lady had resumed a more usual attitude inside her clothes. "Will she be murdered outright?"

"Why should she be?" retorted my guide, amazed. "Nobody saw her face."

In Papua a golden-haired friend and I were riding up into the hills, astride two dreadful quadrupeds, which lay down so persistently that we were obliged to spend the night at a hut, labelled "Government

Rest House." The caretaker was surprised. So were we, for his garments consisted of one piece of string, but his shock of flaring hair was decorated with everything sea and land could produce, from birds of Paradise to crab claws.

We held counsel over a curious dinner. How could we indicate that the fashions of Eden had changed without hurting Papuan feelings, or infringing local custom? At last my friend remembered a bale of brilliant scarlet stuff, with which we hoped to bribe the chiefs of the interior. "The very thing," she said. "It will make a shirt if he can sew; a skirt if he can't." We measured off a generous supply and presented it to the delighted caretaker.

Breakfast was late next morning. "Of course," we decided, "the man is occupied with his unaccustomed dressing." A few minutes later, in walked the object of all our solicitude, garbed in the happiest of smiles . . . and the same piece of string. Round his head was a colossal scarlet turban, a miracle of intricate folds. Out of the top of it projected proudly a couple of crustaceans and a small aviary.

It is no use trying to change the fashions of the East. Missionaries have grown even greyer in the process than the opponents of our latest dances and our latest drinks.

At the court of the Sultan of Djockjakarta, in Java, the lords in waiting must be décolleté to the chest and their ladies to the waist. At home they may wear the tightly-buttoned silk bodices of their race, but they must discard them before entering the presence of their ruler. Only skirts and sword-belts are allowed within the palace walls.

A Druse girl may show one eye to the world with the utmost decorum, but to unveil two eyes would be the limit of bad taste.

A harem woman at home will uncover everything but her hair. All day and all night she wears a close-fitting muslin cap, and this accompanies her even into the baths.

A Japanese woman will wear a quantity of thick wadded kimonos one over another, and walk in them for miles on a hot day. I used to urge a Japanese maid called Toku to remove at least one as we toiled over mountains under midday suns. "It would not be proper for a lady," she reproved me. Eventually we came to Icao, where there are hot medicinal springs. Turning a corner suddenly, we were confronted with two or three human lobsters, boiled scarlet by the hot baths, walking bare and unashamed down the village street. In another moment we saw several more equally red Japanese, lying Adam and Eve-like in pools of hot water.

"Is that proper for ladies?" we asked Toku.

"But, of course!" she said, surprised. "It is a place of baths."

A Samoan girl wears a skirt to her ankles, but nothing above the belt. With us the belt has slipped so low that, very soon, there will be nothing below it. To the West an ankle is a stimulant ; to the East it is a responsibility.

I remember once, while crossing the Libyan Desert in native dress, I used to sleep, curled up on my camel, one arm crooked round the pommel. My feet, in enormous yellow leather sandals, hung down, and perhaps an inch of woollen-stockinged ankle showed beneath my draperies. Jusuf, the caravan leader, was horribly shocked. He used to trot alongside, pulling down my blue cotton barracan and muttering "Sitt Khadija" (the Egyptian name under which I was travelling), "how can you expect to get a good husband if you are so immodest?"

All our pet private habits are as much a matter of latitude as fashion or propriety. Take washing, for instance. The Arab considers us extremely grubby because we do not wash our feet as well as our hands before each meal. We object because he does not wash his clothes.

I am not certain the bath is not the source of most modern evils. The court ladies of Boccaccio, you remember, adopted a lovely village girl and made her Queen of Beauty. They bathed her in oils and scented water until, we are told, "her body was like a sponge," and she ran away to avoid the peril of too much washing.

I once stayed in a little Greek hotel, where the proprietor was indignant when I demanded a bath. "I only cater for clean people," he said. The same request, while I was living in a black and white tent in Raisuli's Moroccan camp, produced equal dismay. "A bath, what for?" asked my Arab attendants. Eventually, they brought me a bowl about the size of a large coffee-cup, filled with lukewarm water and some sprigs of mint.

A German cottager, with whom I lodged, assured me that baths were most dangerous. "When you must wash your hands and face, my child, use a little oil," she said. "It is much more cleansing."

In that wild and woolly part of Australia which, according to novelists, bristles with guns, boundary-riders, and outlaws, I once stayed in a frame "hotel," where there was a notice: "Guests are requested to take off their spurs before going to bed." After many struggles with a cracked basin, I asked the landlady if she could lend me a tub. "Not to-night," she said; "my husband always washes on Saturdays, and if he misses his bath to-day, I'm afraid he'll put it off for another week."



In Japan, an exquisitely clean lath-and-paper hotel provided no means of washing at all. Insistently, and in many languages, I demanded a bath. At last a smiling serving girl signified that my wish was fulfilled. She led me into an open court whose paper walls, I was convinced, were not nearly as blind as they appeared to be. In the centre was a hole, filled with dark and murky-looking water.

Very cautiously, I inserted one foot. Down, down it went. I took a firm grip of the edge. At last my toes touched something slimy and soft. With a squeak I leaped out. The maid was puzzled. "I think the water was changed last year," she said; "but perhaps something *else* has fallen in."

Kissing, like washing, is a habit in the West; a rite in the East. The Latins have made of it an art. In Western Arabia the judge kisses the condemned criminal after pronouncing judgment. The same sacrificial kiss is given in Cambodia by the head priest of a temple to the dancing girls he chooses as its vestals.

In primitive harems it is a sign of respect and, as such, most finely and formally graduated. If the emir or sheikh is in the harem with his family, it is amusing to watch the different way the women greet him. A slave will kiss the hem of his robe, while he pats her shoulder. His daughters will kiss his hands, and he their heads. A wife will press her lips to his shoulder, and her lord will return the salutation on her forehead.

A boy, too, will kiss his father's shoulder and receive an embrace upon both cheeks, but, when the emir's mother enters, she will make only a pretence of bending before her son, who, rising, lifts her up and kisses her mouth.

Christian Abyssinia is as particular about its kisses as Moslem Arabia. An embrace is the regular greeting

among friends, but it would be most improper for any woman to welcome her husband with a kiss. She must pretend not to notice his arrival—even after the longest absence—and she must never even touch his hand in public. Yet two men, or two women, meeting in the market, will repetitively kiss each other's cheek—dozens of little swift kisses like the reports of a Maxim gun.

A servant kisses his master's cloak; a courtier the foot of his prince or the ground in front of it; a villager the staff of his priest. All the devout dismount before a church and kiss its door-step, or even the stones of the surrounding wall. A man addressing a great lady will repeatedly kiss his own hand between the polite greetings he brings her.

The only things the Abyssinians do not kiss, it appears, are each other's mouths. "That would be most improper," said my interpreter. "The lips are meant to kiss, not to be kissed."

It reminded me of an Annamite lady in Cochin China. Slender, exquisitely olive, with eyes like old jade, she listened to my stories of England.

"What, you kiss your husbands!" she exclaimed, in the tone of horror she might have used had I said we struck them. "How improper—but don't they mind?"

After all, in America, by an unrepealed Blue Law of Massachusetts, a husband is forbidden to kiss his wife on Sundays. Whether this is meant to make Sunday a fast-day or a holiday I do not know.

Kissing and gin appear to be hopelessly confused in the plastic mind of post-Volstead America. I watched some youngsters leave a ballroom at Atlantic City. One couple passed close to me.

"I've got a flask in my car," remarked the youth in a commonplace voice. The girl was pretty and her

profile a delicious tilt. "I don't pet," she said. The boy stopped short. "Oh, say then, let's go on dancing!"

No Easterner could better have expressed his scorn of an unveiled woman, neither wife nor mother—who just did not count—only the reason would have been different.

Most things come from the East—fashion from Eden; propriety from China, where first men veiled their women; plucked eyebrows from Arabia, where the girls draw a black line along their foreheads from nose to ear; Russian boots from the Hedjaz, where they are lemon-yellow under draperies sewn with bells; and shingling from Lesbia, where it was a punishment for a moral misdemeanour.

A most attractive English debutante said to me, after a careful glance at the back of my neck: "I think there's something almost improper about having long hair nowadays, don't you?" But the first time an Arab woman saw my bobbed head she exclaimed in horror: "You must keep it secret or no man will respect you."

Meekly, I murmured of convenience and hairpins and close-fitting hats. "Yes, yes," she agreed. "In your country, of course, you think more of utility than beauty." She handed me a water-pipe. Contentedly, we sat on the floor, smoking our long-stemmed narghiles and watching the tobacco glow above the rose-water, while we discussed the impropriety of the West.

Just a year later, without thinking, I took out a cigarette at an educational club meeting in Middle-West America. Next day I bought a paper to see whether my speech had been reported. On the front page was a two-inch heading: 'Traveller's Fag Raises Club Smoke.' And after that came a column or two

about whether feminine cigarettes were respectable or not.

“Women take too much latitude,” remarked some great man, interviewed on the subject, while he was busy, or had a cold in the head. But everything is a matter of latitude, fig-leaves and figures, kisses and curls and smoke.



## CHAPTER XXV

### AN ADVENTURE THAT FAILED

AT one time it was the ambition of my life to see Mecca. I had been living for some months in the African desert among the simplest and most fervent of Moslems. Nightly round the camp-fires, daily on the torrid marches, I had heard these men speak of the House of Allah and the pilgrimage they hoped to do.

I had seen beggars wandering across the Sahara, barefooted, penniless, sick, but sustained during a three or four years' trail by the dream of Mecca. I had seen old men grow young at the thought of it, and the swords of warriors unsheathed with the cry: "Next year, Allah, I come!"

Inspired by something of the same passion, I determined to attempt the pilgrimage, believing that the mosque at Mecca must be as great a revelation of faith as St. Peter's on a Roman Easter or the Cenotaph on Armistice Day.

At that time the pilgrimage, which varies ten days in our year, happened to be in August, which, of course, is the hottest month in the Red Sea. I started at a moment's notice and, owing to the intense damp heat, was unable to find any paint that would stay on my skin. As I had just come out of a hospital after an operation, I had not time to burn my usual brown. This, added to the fact that, though my face with its flat cheek-bones passes muster, I am much too tall and thin for the class of native easiest to represent, made success precarious from the start.

A confederate secured me an Egyptian passport and the Sitt Khadija—the name which had brought me good fortune on several former journeys—was reborn in a darkened railway carriage somewhere between Ismailia and Suez on the hottest of July nights. An Englishwoman walked into the carriage in an embroidered French frock, high-heeled shoes, and a hat that was only simple to the uninitiated masculine eye.

An Egyptian woman came out of it. In the shapeless black habbara and heel-less slippers she seemed to have lost at least 4 inches of height, and the only things that could be seen above her strip of white "burwa" were the painted eyes of the East. If they were grey, they were so heavily kohled that they looked as dark as the formidable brows above them. With beads and straw fan firmly gripped in black-gloved fingers, she shuffled along the Suez platform in the wake of a porter carrying one of those nameless yellow suit-cases whose special mission in life seems to be to resemble every other piece of luggage that was ever conceived. Unused to walking, the Moslem woman moved across a wide sandy square with the uncertain, swaying gait peculiar to dwellers in the harem.

Arrived at a very modest hotel, she timidly asked for a room in a high-pitched voice, and was conducted to a shuttered apartment whose temperature struck her like a blow.

"Allah bless your sleeping," muttered the retreating Arab, and Khadija hanem was left alone to wonder if there was anything in the world more complicated than a pilgrim passport.

I was wakened from doubtful appreciation of the hardest of hard pillows by a thunderous knocking at the door and the impatient voice of my confederate shouting: "Are you ready? Are you ready—we must go to the town for the Hedjaz visa to your passport."

With some *froidueur* I pointed out that it was only 6.30 a.m., but, nevertheless, half an hour later we were speeding over the causeway from Portofia to Suez. The visa proved to be merely another formal decoration of my already ornamental passport, but once more in the car, my confederate turned to me gloomily: "You must have a bath," he said.

I merely gaped, so he explained further: "They will wash you at the disinfecting station and you will be inoculated for cholera."

"Oh, no, I won't," said I with considerable firmness, gingerly moving my already thrice inoculated and vaccinated arms. My companion's emphatic reply was cut short by our arrival at the gates of the wharf, where some policemen asked us our business and misdirected us to the quarantine building.

There I was put in charge of a worn-looking female reminiscent of station waiting-rooms. Impressed by my thick silk habbara, she shuffled through a large bare room where several women were waiting and unlocked what appeared to be a private apartment. There was nothing in it but a bench and a tap. Noticing the latter, I thought this was the moment to try a bribe. It was eminently successful. "You look very clean," she said, and the tap was turned on by way of camouflage, while we sat comfortably on the bench and discussed life in general. The faded lady was Italian and spoke even worse Arabic than mine. She took for granted that I was a Turk and our intimate conversation was only interrupted by the surreptitious entrance of an official who beckoned me out.

Thereafter we hustled from place to place with a crowd of nerve-racked pilgrims, all determined that they *had* lost their luggage, or *would* lose the boat. Courteous officialdom finally came to the rescue, saved me from a further dose of microbes—though my pic-

turesque handmaiden, Bahia, was wrathfully forced to submit—and ushered us on board the small Khedivial steamer that was to take the last batch of Egyptian pilgrims south to Jedda.

I found that, owing to the amazing distaste of even wealthy Egyptians to paying a first-class fare, I had a small six-feet-square cabin to myself and actually on the cool side of the ship. “Cool,” of course, is a comparative term, for the heat at midday was stupendous, and Bahia and I presented the appearance of those who had freshly bathed.

My handmaiden, who to the end believed that I was the much-maligned sister of a wealthy Cairene, was of Bedouin origin and must have had a chequered career, according to the stories of her life with which she regaled me at the most tropical moments. They were not moral, but they were enlightening, and I determined to keep a strict eye on the lady. She was shapeless as to the figure encased in an ill-fitting sage-green galabia, with a sapphire and rose handkerchief adorning—one cannot say “covering”—two immensely long plaits of straight dark hair. This splendour was covered in public with a black meliya; but Bahia, like all women of her class, was careless of veiling and displayed her big brown eyes, kohl-rimmed, and her beautifully shaped mouth marred by blue tattoo marks, with indifference. When I first saw her she had handkerchiefs bandaged right up her forearms, but, in the privacy of my cabin, she unrolled them and displayed rows of heavy gold bangles, at least half a score on each arm. Some of them were made of English sovereigns linked into a chain. She explained that most of them belonged to a fellow-passenger who had lent them to her because she herself was frightened of thieves. I said I was, too, and would she kindly give them back as soon as possible.



We were on board a couple of hours before the boat started, so we bought fruit from the wharf, an immense quantity of grapes, and a water-melon twenty inches in diameter. I thought it would last us a week, but I had reckoned without Bahia's appetite and the fact that water-melon undoubtedly grows on one. We ate it at intervals all through the day, when we were not occupied in unsticking ourselves. As the heat increased, we stuck to the paint of everything—seats, walls, and berth rails, and it took a good, hard wrench to separate the nameless suit-case from an equally yellow trunk, which contained our cooking apparatus, our prayer-carpet, and our pilgrim clothes.

When the last perspiring pilgrim had scuttled aboard and the last unwieldy bundle had been hauled after him, a muezzin loudly intoned the call to prayer, and pilgrims on board joined with their friends on the shore in the afternoon prayer. Amidst sustained chaunting in monotonous cadence, broken by weeping on the wharf from those who, apparently, would have liked to come but could not, we drifted away, but not till Suez had faded to the north did the rhythmic chant refrain from praising Allah and his Prophet.

Thereafter the day was monotonous, save when I suddenly came face to face with a sheikh whom I had met at Siwa on my return from Kufara. He could not possibly have recognized the blurred, bisted eyes between stiff black and white, yet my heart missed a beat at the sound of his grave "Salaam aleikum" as he passed me. The next interest was provided by Bahia, who would insist on smoking. Having warned her that it was "haram" (forbidden), and everything else I could think of, I left her to her fate. It came swiftly. We had been sitting with two or three other women on the lower deck, amidst a mess of melon-seeds and fig-skins. A loquacious dame had been discoursing on

the virtues of her only son, while trying to find out exactly how much money we all had, in order that she might attach herself to the most suitable party. Not wishing to be selected as a companion for her journey from Jedda to Mecca, I was just retiring to my cabin when a stern-faced desert Arab passed, his face hard and lined beneath his *ma-araka*—"Moslems do not smoke," he said harshly to Bahia, and waited immobile till she dropped her cigarette overboard. I had expected swift storm of protest, but there came from the culprit only an unintelligible murmur.

In order to be ready for the sunset prayers, we decided to bathe early; but, to my horror, I found that one had no chance of using the bathroom alone. Brown skin, white skin, black skin, limbs young and svelte, unspoiled as yet by harem or by peasants' labour, limbs gnarled and unwieldy as the branches of old trees, disported themselves in swift turn under a cold, salt douche, but soap was at a premium and my scented tablet returned to me very thin and worn.

As night approached, a frenzy of prayer and song arose on all sides. I managed to discover an empty square foot or two on the upper deck, of which I took almost forcible possession, with the aid of a Fayum sheikh who felt the heat as much as I did. From this post of vantage, I watched the devotions of the crowd. It was an interesting sight, for 600 pilgrims were crowded on the little steamer. Every inch of deck was occupied by crouching human beings surrounded by every shape and form of luggage, most of it bulky. Nobody had room to stretch themselves out straight, but certainly nobody seemed to mind. The utmost good temper reigned and everyone made way for his fellows. On the first-class deck, whole families, or groups of students, or clusters of elderly grey-beards occupied the same carpet within a sort of wall of piled

luggage, wherein the women brewed coffee and made sweet lemonade, alternately chewing dry biscuits—of which every pilgrim seemed to have a basketful—and sucking bitter limes.

Below, the crowd was much greater and they must have slept in a sitting posture, cross-legged, for there was no room to move. All, of course, were Egyptians, but the difference of type was marked. There were fat, pale merchants from the cities and grey-bearded blacks from the South. Tattooed Bedouin women, brown and lean, rubbed shoulders with unwieldy, untidy dames who looked as if they had never walked an inch in their lives. There were keen, quiet old Arabs, whose far-seeing eyes already visualized "the House of Allah," of which they had dreamed all their lives, the sheikh in his spotless robe and the beggar wondering if his poor hoarded silver would suffice. The young men, plump and pale, intoned quick passages from sacred books, each one attempting to read quicker and louder than his fellows. Their elders muttered over the polished sibhas (beads) which slipped monotonously through their fingers.

From all sides rose songs in praise of the Prophet, or loudly repeated sentences, such as: "Here I come, Prophet of God," or "This very month, if Allah wills, in the mountain of Arafat I shall be." Sometimes a circle of fanatics would spring to their feet, and one of them would shout "Allah, Allah," all bending forward violently with each mention of the name, till the spokesman's frenzy exhausted him, when the next one would take up the cry till his voice or his strength flagged, and so on round the circle. The Bedouins improvised their own rhymes of praise and prayer, and these, sung in drawling nasal tones, were often loudly applauded. Whenever the riot of sound died for a few minutes, some elderly man would rise and intone

slowly and magnificently the "Shehada" with its triumphant "There is no God but God."

By ten, however, everybody was apparently asleep, curled into the smallest possible space, and there was silence till a muezzin woke the pilgrims for the dawn prayers.

I remember I spent most of the morning crouching on the lower deck, far aft, behind the wheel. It was rather a cool spot and I had been asked to share her carpet by a woman from a Cairo village. She was with a party of four men, so I asked her why there were not more peasant women on board, and received the startling reply: "They fear the English."

"But why? Is there any danger from the English?" I asked apprehensively.

"Nobody knows," she replied. "But of what use are the English now?"

Feeling it was scarcely the time for propaganda, I changed the conversation, and we made a quite new-tasting coffee underneath the wheel. "It has much spice in it," said my hostess, "therefore it does not dry up the body."

She told me my Egyptian paper money would be useless in the Hedjaz, where I would receive only a quarter of its value; borrowed a pair of white cotton stockings, as she had forgotten to bring any for the "Ihram," (pilgrim garb) and finally asked me: "Are you going to visit the Prophet after you have seen the house of Allah?" I replied that I would like to go to Medina if I had enough money. "It is very expensive, I fear," she answered; "but it is all well arranged and the prices are fixed. Would you like to travel with us, as you have no man?"

Again I was struck by the general spirit of helpfulness which prevailed. The poorer pilgrims bring with them sufficient food for the whole journey, chiefly dry



cake, nuts, biscuits, coffee, tea and sugar, with quantities of immense, pink-fleshed water-melons, and they are only too anxious to share it with anyone less well provided. Of course an act of charity on the pilgrimage is doubly blest and no one need fear to ask for alms or help.

After we had discussed our family history at length—mine was rapidly becoming exceedingly complicated—the Siwa sheikh and two followers came aft and were entertained by our neighbours on the left, one of whom apparently was the only Hanbali (one of the four Sunni sects) on board, which led to a discussion on the merits of the various muftis at Mecca. The Siwa man cut it short by announcing that they were all Senussi in his town. I decided I had better make his acquaintance, so carelessly upset a bag of biscuits over his side of the luggage bales, against which I was leaning. By the time the last one was retrieved, he had offered me the dates for which his land is famous, and I felt our friendship was established.

A very cheerful friendliness prevails among all classes on the pilgrimage, and also a certain laxity. Even the upper-class women are careless with their veils, and talk with men almost on equal terms. It is an extraordinary mixture of picnic and religious festival. The "Haj-el-Beit"<sup>1</sup> may have represented an almost impossible ideal, handed on by the father whose savings had not quite reached the requisite amount, to the hard-working son who sees a vision realized when he leaves the quay at Suez; but it is also the greatest "outing" of the Moslem's life and he is determined to enjoy it.

The two great subjects of conversation were how (on returning) we could smuggle the holy water of Zem-Zem well, a certain cure for all sickness, through the impious quarantine, which persisted in considering

<sup>1</sup> Pilgrimage to the House (of God).

it infectious and confiscating it, and how to outwit the nimble thief who makes a fat living out of the pilgrimage. Concerning the latter, tales waxed thrilling and wild, till Bahia warned me never to let a camel-man help me off my steed lest his cunning fingers should be feeling for hidden coin.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### BEING THE ACCOUNT OF AN ATTEMPTED PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA

ON the third day we all donned the Ihram or pilgrim garb, which necessitated very thorough ablutions beforehand. My enthusiastic servant woke me at 6 a.m., just as I was dozing off after a night of literal torture—the heat had been so intense in the stuffy cabin, that I could not bear to lie down—but we did not manage to enter the bathroom till nearly noon. Every single one of the 600 pilgrims had to have a bath and, as rows of sweating humans crowded round the doors, fragments of conversation were amusing. “The English sell the water. It is not good to make money out of poor pilgrims!” and the captain’s north-country voice shouting: “You must stop those folk using so much water. Ten tons yesterday and ten tons to-day; soon we shan’t have enough to drink.”

The necessary ablutions consist of a bath, washing the head, cutting the nails, and shaving all hair from the body. When Bahia and I finally forced our way into the bathroom, we found everyone frantically scrubbing each other’s backs in an effort to be friendly and helpful. Then there was much consultation as to how to put on the Ihram. The men’s garments were of extreme simplicity, for they consisted simply of two sheets or rough bath towels, one wound round like a kilt and the other slung across the shoulders. In the case of the fat and the portly, there was always a considerable hiatus which afforded some amusement to

their friends, but the sheeted men looked rather well, because their draperies were long and one end could be flung in graceful folds, toga-wise, over the shoulders. The women wore a straight white galabia made of coarse thick calico, like a very cheap nightdress. Over a close-fitting white handkerchief which hid all the hair, they donned a flowing transparent scarf which could be arranged to hide as much of the face as one wished and, over all, a "meliya"—merely a large bed-sheet. This last item was the difficulty, and it very soon got dragged.

The pilgrim crowd has sometimes been described as reminiscent of a Turkish bath. Certainly individual instances are distinctly humorous, but, taken generally, the mass of snowy-robed figures, tense, eager, lit with a common purpose, the men bare-headed under the intolerant sun, the women shrouded and spotless as white Carmelite nuns, is an imposing sight.

All through the hot afternoon we crouched in our few square feet of deck, waiting anxiously for the siren blast that would announce our entry into "Haramain"—the sacred territory. As we were all feeling particularly clean and immaculate, we amused ourselves by criticizing Europeans, and I remember we decided that the English were a very dirty race. When at 6 p.m. the longed-for blast thrilled the ship to sudden life, it was drowned in the great wave of sound that burst from 600 throats. Few knew quite what they were shouting, but everybody shouted something. The Imams formed circles of their followers all over the decks, and blared forth the prayers of their sects and confraternities. Ancient "ulema," with shaven heads and horn spectacles, read aloud page after page from well-thumbed books, while the ignorant gathered round them for instruction. The simpler pilgrims contented themselves with crying repeatedly: "I am here, I am here, oh



Allah, I am here!" A couple of long-haired dervishes flung their tortured bodies from side to side, shouting a repetitive prayer till foam frothed from their mouths and their upturned eyes showed fixed and glassy.

Everybody tried to explain most enthusiastically to his neighbour the complete rites of the pilgrimage. Consequently, after the first hour, we gathered so much information that we were obliged to go and sit at the feet of a noted Alim to have it all sorted out. "Tell me, oh my Father," I asked, "what is sin and what is not sin?" The old man had done the pilgrimage five times, so he was fluent. "For the 'Omrah,'" he said, "you must use no scent and no kohl and you must not take off the Ihram for four days and four nights, neither must you bathe nor comb your hair." He paused and the full horrors of it sank into my mind—not to bathe or to change one's stiff, hot clothes for ninety-six hours in a climate where everything was literally soaked in less than one hour! The prohibition of kohl also worried me, for without their dark fantastic rings, my eyes were a very English grey.

"If thou lettest one single hair be seen, pull it out and give a sheep to the poor." This was a triumph for me, for I was most discreet with regard to my curly locks, but Bahia's black plaits straggled recklessly wild.

"If a paring of thy nail falls, or an eyelash, kill a sheep for the poor, and if thou seest a flea upon thyself catch it and do likewise." After this last remark we were so depressed that we left the ancient sage.

"Insha-allah, sheep are not expensive in Mecca!" muttered Bahia anxiously.

If it were possible for the weather to grow hotter, I think it did so on the fourth day, for I could bear the cabin no longer: so, for comfort and support, I sought the company of a Suez family who had done the pilgrimage half a dozen times. One of the women broke

to me the horrible fact that henceforth it was a sin (literally "haram") to cover one's face. She pulled at my stiff transparent veil till she had arranged it like a nun's coif, close wound from chin to brow, but leaving one's features most unfortunately visible. Then, of course, came the inevitable questions—my father was an Egyptian, my mother Turkish, I said, and raved about Stamboul, from memory of Pierre Loti and Claude Farère. We talked for some time in well-turned religious phrases and they taught me some of the special Hadj prayers. "But have you put on pilgrim garb for the 'Omrah' or the 'Hadj,'" they asked—the latter means at least thirteen days without a bath, so I chose the former.

"And what is your sect?"

"I am a Malki."

They looked puzzled. "But the Turks are all Hanafi," they said, and I saw that I was irretrievably relegated to the Ottoman Empire, which struck me as odd, as I have never entered its bournes and my knowledge of the language is negligible.

However, an old sheikh came to the rescue.

"I have always wanted my son to marry a Turk," he said, inspecting me closely. "When we return to Egypt—with safety, Insha-allah, you shall be his bride."

The idea evidently pleased him, for he returned to the subject several times and, having asked my age, name, full family history, and whether I could cook, he announced that he would approach my brother (a wholly fictitious individual) on the subject. At that moment one of the sailors passed and threw me an English phrase—I wondered if he guessed.

On the evening of the fourth day we anchored in the open roadstead outside Jedda and thereafter commenced a period of forty hours which can only be described by one word—hell. As soon as the boat

stopped, there was uproar, as every pilgrim started shouting questions at his neighbour and, with a brief interval, during which a doctor rushed on board and looked at the ship's papers, it continued all night and rose to a babel of inarticulate yells shortly after dawn, when a crowd of feluccas gathered round the boat and everyone tried to get into the same one at once. Some three hours were spent in lowering the luggage, arranging it, rearranging it, and wedging the unfortunate passengers on it and between it—very often underneath it.

A felucca should hold comfortably twenty or twenty-five people. Ours contained fifty-seven, with immense quantities of inconveniently-shaped luggage, and we drifted forth into a dead calm sea without a breath of wind. Consequently, we spent four of the hottest hours of the August day crouched, cramped and dripping, in our intolerably stiff and sticky clothes, on the least sharp-cornered luggage we could find. As a matter of fact there was little choice, because we were so wedged in that nobody could possibly move without upsetting the perilous positions of half a dozen neighbours. After the first hour or two, women began to collapse from the heat, but there was nowhere to put them. I squeezed myself into a still smaller corner to allow one sufferer to curl up with head on my knee, but my holland umbrella I would not give up. Umbrellas are permitted to women and forbidden to men, but many of the latter use them to protect their bare or shaven heads. Just when I wondered whether I could endure much longer and whether the woman in my lap was already dead, for her groans had suddenly ceased, a mountainous female who literally bulged over us from behind, chose this opportune moment to remark: "You are not in the least like a Turk, I believe you are English or French."



Luckily, everybody was so hot and tired that her comment aroused no interest. I exploded into a shower of completely meaningless Turkish words—verbs and nouns strung together, helped out with Japanese and Spanish. She was one of the few Pashawat ladies on board, and she knew that this was no Latin or Saxon tongue, so she quailed a little and merely demanded the “Fatha.” I was able to satisfy her that I was a Moslem and, when she began to waver about my nationality, I laughed at her till she gave in; but the remaining two hours I spent in that human sardine box were filled with agonized prayers that there might be nobody on board who spoke Turkish.

Fortunately, practically all the pilgrims were of the poorer classes, many of them Fellaheen, and nothing further happened save that three more women and one man collapsed, and when, about 2 p.m., we finally accomplished the few hundred yards between our steamer and the quarantine island, they all had to be carried ashore and laid limply in the coolest spots.

I think our felucca must have been somewhat more heavily laden than the rest, for we were the last to arrive and, therefore, all places were taken in the long barn-like structures that shelter the unfortunate pilgrims for twenty-four hours. The island, Gezera, is perhaps 200 yards square and, of course, there is no water on it. All water has to be brought from the mainland and stored in cisterns. It is doled out in small rations to the pilgrims, but it is often insufficient and the wise bring their own zemzimayas full. As a matter of fact there is not much hardship for the ordinary pilgrim, as he is never desirous of privacy and probably finds no fault with the long bare shed which he shares with fifty or sixty others, but it is very hard indeed for the better class hadji. If he arrives late, he may not even find a place in one of the rooms, and he will have to



spread his mat on the shore, or sit on the jetty where he will have the shelter of a roof.

Bahia and I found that there was no place left in the shade. Every room was crowded and every corner on beach or wharf remote from the sun already had its occupants, while a free fight was going on round the water cistern. However, luck favoured us, and I finally discovered a rather dusty passage between a room labelled "bureau" and a sort of guard-room. Here we spread our very nice carpet and on it deposited the one thing we had had the physical energy to lift from the boat to the jetty, and carry all over the island in search of rest—a basket of food.

A passing soldier, seeing our parched expressions, mercifully offered us some of his water, and we found we could buy dates, olives and bread from a store on the island. We had barely laid down to sleep, hot, dirty and exhausted, pillowless and cross, when we were joined by the ponderous lady, mighty of stature, with coal-black brows and flabby cheeks. The passage positively shook as she marched up it, followed by her ridiculously small slave, about eight years old. The latter's name was Amma, but I christened her "the Afrit," because she was the most fiendish child I have ever known. The P. L.<sup>1</sup> had been even less fortunate than we, so she settled herself firmly beside us and her amazingly raucous voice spoilt all chance of sleep. Towards evening, however, the soldier (Mohammed) took pity on us, and allowed us to spread our carpet in a corner of the guard-room, while the P. L. found shelter with a family in one of the smaller rooms. Mohammed also made relays of tea for us, and we felt altogether happier until a rumour started that some of the people suffering from heat-stroke had got typhoid or cholera. The idea of being quarantined for any

<sup>1</sup> Ponderous Lady.

lengthy period on that island was terrible, and, for the first time in my life, I realized the awful feeling of utter helplessness—the useless, rebellious despair of the masses against even beneficent officialdom.

We were visited by many pilgrims who came to hear if we had any further news, and a rather pretty woman offered me a tube of attar of roses in exchange for some water. When various other cases of heat-stroke (or whatever it was) had been discovered, we felt sleep was the only thing left.

I have spent many uncomfortable nights in my life—I once sat up for thirty-six hours in a second-class Chinese troop-train in Cochin China, I got quite used to polished wood opium couches with no pillow; and I remember a weary night spent on a singularly hard table in a mosquito-infested hut on a Samoan volcano; but I have never spent more acutely miserable hours of darkness than those in the Gezira. I made a pillow of my shoes, while Bahia curled her portly, dripping form much nearer me than I liked, and the soldier and his two sons arranged themselves on the window sills.

After half an hour the Egyptian doctor arrived and was noisily ushered upstairs, after which “the Afrit” came in no fewer than eight times to look for some mysterious object of which she apparently did not know the name. The last time the soldier’s patience gave way and, as there was no key with which to lock her out, he retired with his mat to the passage. Then the nocturnal chanting began, and wave after wave of sound beat against our walls. One particular cry, a wild, reiterated “Zoh!” “Zoh!” is like the roar of lions in the desert.

I lay awake listening to the majesty of prayer, its fury and its fanaticism apparent in the still darkness, till about 1 a.m., when the P. L. thundered in with elephantine tread and flung herself on the shaking floor,

A couple of hours later she woke to have a dispute with "the Afrit" and, complaining loudly of the heat, stumbled out again, sending her attendant imp back to fetch the things she had left behind. By that time my spirit was broken and I welcomed the dawn and a slice of pink-fleshed melon and sour bread, which was all that Bahia's appetite had left of our provisions. About 6 a.m., it was suggested unanimously that I should visit the doctor, whose footsteps could be heard above, and find out our fate. Of course it was unwise, but I stumped cheerfully upstairs knowing that I was gaining a tremendous reputation for courage among the watching pilgrims. Several elderly sheikhs summoned up sufficient energy to follow me and we were welcomed by a delightful young Egyptian, who calmed our fears by assuring us that we could depart at 7.30 a.m. After which the men talked politics and I listened with interest in the background till the usual question came: "You are Turkish, ya hanem, I am sure you talk French or English."

"Only French," I replied sadly, and thereafter we had the most charming conversation about our mutual acquaintances in Stamboul and Cairo. Luckily we had so many in the latter place that I was able to be a little vague about the former. I was enjoying myself very much when the young doctor exclaimed: "But of course I will introduce you to a nice Turkish family in Jedda. I will take you straight to their house and you will feel at home and be able to talk Turkish with them."

If only he could have guessed how little I should feel at home—but worse was to come. "The Emir Zeid is in Jedda. His mother is Turkish, so I must tell him about you—you must meet."

"Oh, thank you very much," said I feebly, wondering in how many different countries I had met

Emir Zeid and his famous brother, and whether he could possibly fail to recognize me, and what his feelings would be if asked to talk Turkish to me.

I kept my head sufficiently to say I thought I would rather meet all these friends after I returned from Mecca, having given up the pilgrim garb.

"But you are the cleanest person I have seen," said the doctor, surprised, and departed to glance hastily round the island, before ordering everyone aboard the waiting feluccas. This time there was a faint breeze, which strengthened as we tacked in and out of the reefs near Jedda, so we managed to endure the four and a half hours more or less happily, in spite of a violent dispute between Bahia and the boatmen over a coin representing the value of about threepence. All those not completely incapacitated joined in on one side or the other, till the boatman, with an oath, flung the nickel at my handmaiden with the remark that he could not conceive how a good Moslem like Khadija hanem could employ a Christian servant. This, however, was felt to be too great an insult, and the whole boat protested loudly till the boatman gave way and, making a sudden perilous run along the edge of his craft, seized Bahia's head in both hands and imprinted a warm kiss on her forehead. Just as we were in the middle of one of our repetitive songs, there was a terrific bump and we stuck fast at the entrance to the inner roadstead. Thereafter the hell in which we had been living for the last thirty-six hours increased considerably.

One by one the overcrowded feluccas stuck in the shallow water and, under a noontide sun, we sweltered till flat-bottomed craft came out to rescue us—ininitely slowly. As all the pilgrims leaped into them at once, hauling after them as much baggage as possible, and dragging the sick helplessly between them, the larger



craft overturned and several pilgrims, including myself, were flung into the water. This would not have mattered very much because it was only about three feet deep, but we got wedged down between the sides of two of the smaller craft, and, for a horrible moment, I thought I should be drowned in an ignominious scrimmage.

Mercifully, someone caught my arm from above, and, with a jerk that nearly wrenched it from its socket, hauled me up into the felucca, where Bahia was screeching wildly without attempting to do anything.

For a moment, I could not understand why, even in the turmoil of the moment, people were looking at me curiously. Then I discovered that most of my clothing was gone. Veil, sheet and scarf were lost in the harbour and my curly hair waved above a hot, pink face, and a severely plain calico galabia! At this terrible instant I found myself gazing across a heaving mass of pilgrims at the portly occupant of a Sherifian boat, which had come up to see the cause of the disturbance. I remember thinking even then that the official's face showed more surprise than was justified; but various women were pulling me about, offering me portions of their attire, so the incident made little impression at the moment.

Even the little feluccas stuck once or twice on their way in, and we were laboriously pushed off by nude bronze figures splashing in the shallows. Finally, our particular craft ran solidly aground a few yards beyond the end of the jetty, and we were dragged by enthusiastic pilgrims from boat to boat till at last we stood on the quay.

Behind a scarlet curtain, an English doctor was doing quick work with a hypodermic syringe, but this I felt I could not bear, so I pushed myself in between two pilgrims unknown to me and, when my turn came,

I said swiftly: "English, been inoculated for four diseases already." I do not know whether English quarantine doctors at Jedda are in the habit of being thus addressed by grey-eyed pilgrims, but this one showed remarkable presence of mind and swiftness of invention, so that I passed on plus a yellow sphere of disinfectant on my arm, but minus a second dose of cholera mixture.

The rest of the quay was divided into little pens, through which we were driven like sheep. I rather think the guardian of the first one demanded proof of inoculation, whereon he smeared an indelible pencil across my wrist, while in the second we were requested to pay a somewhat exorbitant fare for the last bit of our slow passages.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE PILGRIMAGE CONTINUED

AT last, hot, tired, desperately hungry and thirsty, we passed out of a gate and out of the nightmare. Somebody said, "here are the mutowifeen," and we found ourselves in another pen between a double row of well-dressed, intelligent-looking Arabs, one or two of them with short swords in bright embroidered belts. The most imposing personage near the gate, with gold sword and splendid kufiya, was the head mutowif, and if any pilgrim had not already chosen his temporary guide, philosopher and friend, he was asked his nationality by this individual and doled out to the correct mutowif.

As a matter of fact the mutowifs themselves live in Mecca, but they have wakils in Jedda who meet the pilgrim boats and take charge of those whose countries they respectively represent. I was very fortunate in having an introduction to one of the best-known guides—Bakr Hanowi—so, as soon as I called out this name a couple of pale, thin individuals rose from somewhere in the double line of chairs and took possession of us in the most comforting manner. They shepherded us out on to a large wharf, where half a dozen sellers of bright-coloured liquids bore down upon us with most inviting looking drinks. Their taste was not quite equal to their appearance, but I drank one glass of each colour, with the idea that if one was going to get cholera one might as well do it thoroughly. The wakil, Abdulla, spread our carpet beside a convenient

pillar, took away our passports, which we had been wearing hung round our necks in flat tin cases, and left us to wait the arrival of our luggage, still stranded in the heavy feluccas. We were immediately surrounded by sweetmeat-sellers who offered us all kinds of sticky delicacies on trays, but they were not as prettily coloured as the drinks, so I waved them away. The ponderous lady soon joined us with a few other pilgrims, all bewailing their lost luggage and the hated "needle." I believe the most ignorant considered this was a truly English method of getting rid of superfluous Egyptians. I assured them (with infinitely more truth than most of my statements contained) that "it had not hurt me in the least."

As there was no sign of the luggage, Abdulla suggested we should go up to his house and return later; but Bahia was feeling ill and refused to move from the shade and comparative cool of the wharf, so I left her with some of our friends and the wakil, and started off alone into a white blaze of heat that upset all my preconceived ideas of the tropics, even those of Livingstone and the Zambezi in June. Nevertheless I found Jedda attractive, especially when we turned out of the dusty main street, with semi-European shops and the mosque with a slender white madna, into delicious shady by-ways, where the tall, irregular houses leaned together so that their latticed balconies of carved wood seemed to be whispering harem secrets above the heads of the rare passers-by.

Everywhere were preparations for the pilgrimage—lines of girbas hanging on a wall, a row of shug-dufs, clumsy and unwieldy, waiting for hire, and, blocking every side street, the slender, shaven Hedjazi camels which take the pilgrims to Mecca—yet there were no crowds. Even the covered suqs through which we passed, were almost deserted, save for the sleepy mer-



chants lazily flicking flies off their meat and fruits, or asleep on their piled carpets, or for a few sturdy Bedawi in coarse blue galabias, with curved knives in scarlet sashes and tasselled kufiyas swinging over long plaited hair. To me it is the old houses of Jedda which are its chief charm, not the suqs, which cannot compare with those of Fez or Damascus.

Bakr Hanowi's dwelling was typical of its kind—infinitely high, grey and secretive, with its closed balconies built out in tiers above the very narrow street. Abdulla led me up dark flights of stairs into the cool rooms stretching right across the house, so that the breeze blew through them. On one side, the open balcony of dark carved wood looked into a little yard with pots of mauve flowers hung above it, and, on the other, an immense divan was built out above the street with delicious latticed panels, making the room dim and shadowy, but allowing one to peep through the fretted carving at the pilgrims below. There was nothing in either room except the carpets which covered the floor, and the wide, hard divans with their rows of stiff, solid bolsters; but I have rarely felt more thankful than when I curled myself into a corner of the largest one, and peered down from my projecting seat on to the dusty porters who were squabbling over a few qurush in the toy street below me.

The lady of the house came to visit me—a pale, frail woman, grey and worn, with lovely slender feet, whose toes were hennaed and whose ankles were encircled by heavy silver bands.

She wore tight-fitting white trousers and a thin white galabia with a transparent scarf wound over her head, and she looked so clean she made my stiff calico garment feel dirtier than ever. The appalling state of dirt one must get into if one follows the rule strictly, is perhaps the worst hardship of the pilgrimage. My

hostess had a soft sweet voice and she talked to me sadly about the way the pilgrims from Egypt were decreasing in numbers. "This year only three thousand have come and few of them are people of good class. It is the Gezira that they are afraid of, and the English do not like the pilgrimage. They have made many severe rules so as to stop it. Besides, there is war between the Egyptians and the English, isn't there?"

I assured her we had led a very peaceful life in Alexandria, but my words had little effect.

The Egyptian pilgrims are more frightened of, than averse to, the English, but they apparently spread some odd stories in Jedda. We came by the last Egyptian boat, so we got the full flavour of them.

Bahia arrived with the luggage about 4 o'clock, in a state of complete collapse from heat and possibly too many sweetmeats. She developed fever and had to be nursed seriously for twenty-four hours, during which time she lay limply on a divan and I had to cope with many visitors alone.

The day of our arrival I was so tired, having eaten nothing since the melon at dawn, that I discouraged as much as possible the flow of curious pilgrims who came to ask our news and tell us theirs, and devoted most of my attention to securing food. Generally, pilgrims buy their own supplies in the suqs and cook them; but Bahia could not move and my culinary skill is not great. Therefore Abdulla arranged for a cook-shop to send in a meal and, just as the dark came on and the first mosquitoes began biting, there arrived a small boy almost invisible under the big tray he carried. The feast was somewhat reminiscent of Kufara days, for there were the same numerous dishes of vegetables and oddments of meat buried in rich sauces, and flanked with piles of savoury rice and flat hot cakes of bread. Unfortunately, the Jedda water is bad and scarce,

because it is brought in from wells outside the town by camel loads, and sold to the people for 4 or 5 qurush a tinful. There is a government condensing machine, but the pilgrims do not get the benefit of its water. The night we arrived, Abdulla's brother developed fever, which became so bad the next day that the gentle lady with the silver anklets left us alone except for a few short visits.

Abdulla woke me at 5 a.m., and we went to the suq to buy necessities for our journey to Mecca. There was plenty of meat of a somewhat inferior quality, grapes, figs, bananas and melons sent all the way from Taif by camel and, therefore, very expensive, dates, but practically no vegetables.

India, Egypt and Persia, apparently, all contribute their goods to a town which has no special industries of its own, and European stores may be bought at about double their usual prices. The one thing in which Jedda appears to specialize is strange non-alcoholic drinks of startling hues, such as sherbets, syrups, lemonades, etc. Returning laden with parcels, shuffling in heel-less pilgrim sandals and trying to keep my sheet from slipping off altogether, I could not resist a shop where the bottles were all colours of the rainbow, so Abdulla and I split a rich purple drink and consequently dripped more than usual as we toiled up his uneven stairs.

"Bahia is a little better," announced one, Fadda, the blackest slave girl I have ever seen, whom I had left in charge, so I determined to spend the morning writing in my delightful balcony corner; but my peace was rudely destroyed by the sudden appearance of two richly-garbed and imposing individuals in silken kaftans and white turbans swathed round plaited straw caps or brimless hats. I have not the least idea who they were, but it was quite evident that they were deeply sus-



picious of me. While sitting one on each side of me on a big divan, they politely and smilingly plied me with intimate questions. I think they thought I was a Greek impostor. One of them had a disagreeable face and I disliked him at once, but the other had a friendly smile and I felt we might get on quite well if I knew who he was. When I had told him the name of my Egyptian father and husband and my Turkish mother, with other details of my life, he suddenly asked me if I had been in America. I replied no, but that I knew Paris well and, in order to change the conversation, I added that I had seen the Emir Feisul there, upon which the nice one smiled his widest and said that the Emir was beloved in whatever country he visited. I thought this might not be strictly true of Paris, but I had already found that his name worked magic in Arabia. We discovered his photograph in a corner of the smaller room and subsequently a friendly conversation waxed round the merits of the Sherif's third son. However, my uninvited guests departed obviously suspicious, and I wondered what their next step would be. I spent a miserable morning thinking of the unveiled appearance I had presented at the quay, and trying to remember the name of the official who had looked at me most suspiciously from the Sherifian boat. It was not till the afternoon that I remembered it was Abdul Melek, the Sherifian wazir in Cairo, whom I ought to have known as well as my own brother, considering the many times we had met. If only my veil and sheet (meliya) had not been torn off in the free fight among the feluccas, all might have been well. At the time I had paid little attention to it, because the arm by which I had been roughly hauled out from a wedged position half under water between two feluccas was badly wrenched, and several of the women were in worse condition than myself. However, all



these memories now came to torment me, and Bahia must have found me an unenthusiastic companion as we bought stores, arranged a camel string for Medina, and visited certain notables to whom I had letters of introduction.

Nothing more happened that day, and I made all arrangements to start for Mecca the following afternoon. We bought a shug-duf, a most amazing construction in which two people balance perilously on a couple of wide bed-like trays slung on either side of the camel, with the luggage piled in the middle. It has a lattice roof and sides, covered with a carpet, so that the whole thing resembles a sort of clumsy tent; but, unless both travellers are equal in weight, and unless they both get in and out at exactly the same moment, the whole shug-duf overbalances. We wandered through the suqs in search of provisions and bought dates, melons and bread, with olives and onions for Bahia, who had odd tastes, and clay jars to keep the water cool, and a sheep each to give to the poor in order to ensure a successful pilgrimage. Then we returned to our house and watched the crowd of pilgrims all preparing for the journey.

We were lodged in one of the streets in the Egyptian pilgrim quarters. Consequently all our friends of the boat could be heard shouting and screaming in various directions. I should not have conceived it possible that even 600 throats could have made such a noise, and the babel only increased with the darkness. The richer pilgrims hire a couple or more rooms, as we had done, but the poorer merely pay a few qurush for floor-space in an immensely long hall, and do most of their cooking in the street or on any flat available roof. Most of that night we had a stream of visitors, including the ponderous lady with her attendant "Afrit." I remember that, while

conversing pleasantly about the exorbitant prices of the country, I caught forty-three bugs crawling up my ankle. Sleep was an impossibility in any case, because of the mosquitoes who do not content themselves with humming. They have a particularly vicious squeal, and after that second night there was not a single unbitten space on my anatomy. On the contrary, in most places, the bites were superimposed one upon another.

We rose with the sun to see the departure of my Medina camels. I had to send them on ahead, as this particular year there was to be no regular pilgrim traffic between the two holy cities, and all the camels in Mecca would be needed to bring back the ordinary pilgrims. I had some difficulty in persuading Mirzuk el Ourdi, a well-known Bedouin, to undertake this journey, as there was much fighting between the Ateibah tribes, the latter of whom show leanings towards the Ikhwanism of Nejd. However, a gold watch and a tactful bribe decided him to brave the perils of the Eastern track—the famous Darb esh Sharkia. The Egyptian caravan was not due to start till late afternoon, when it would ride all through the night to Bahari, the half-way halting-place on the way to Mecca, but Abdulla went to fetch his charges' passports in the morning.

Then the blow fell. All were returned except ours, and no reason was given for this omission. All Abdulla would say was that it was the will of Allah, but his whole manner had changed. Instead of almost cringing politeness, he became frankly threatening, and I expected we should be turned out of the house. Bahia wanted to sit down and weep, but I remembered the name of a friend's friend, an Egyptian who lived in Jedda, and I determined to invoke his aid. Nobody knew where he lived, so, for three hours, we

trudged wearily from street to suq, from house to house. Veiled and muffled as I was, the heat was intolerable, and pilgrim sandals are not conducive to comfort. Very soon I had huge blisters on my soles, but I was determined not to give in. As we were pilgrims, we met with courtesy everywhere and, at one very large house where we hoped our quest would have ended, we were invited in by a pretty girl in the lightest of attire. She wore only a little transparent muslin corselet and a length of striped cotton stuff, rose and blue, wound round her slender hips. She made us "fadhl" in a great airy room, and slaves brought us cups of unpleasant scented tea with sweet sticky biscuits.

We escaped as soon as possible to resume our quest, and I could not help being struck by the varied charms of old Jedda. Quite unexpectedly one would turn a corner and find oneself in an open square, or wide street, with a tapering white madna at one corner and odd little booths of carved woodwork in the shadow. The main population appears to spend its time asleep on string bedsteads before the doors of their houses, but the women are among the most discreet in the world of Islam, for one sees nothing at all of their faces. The white, transparent indoor dress is tucked up round the waist, and the long white tight-fitting trousers stuffed into soft primrose-yellow leather boots. It is a formidable garment, whose top edge is stiffly starched to stand erect above the head and support the meliya's folds, and, with only the tiniest slit for the eyes, it falls wide and embroidered to the knees, making a sort of apron which can be occasionally glimpsed when the blue silk striped melu'a, edged with silver or gold, sways open an inch or two. Some of the women have tiny gilt bells sewn into the edges of this upper garment, so that it tinkles as they move.



My friend's friend was finally discovered, just as life had become a flaming river of heat which dripped from brow to heel, and, with swift generosity, he put himself entirely at our service. "But it is to the English you must go, Khadija hanem—I know an officer here. He arranges all the Egyptian passports. I will take you to him and he will help you at once."

In vain I protested that I was shy, that I was exhausted, that I was not used to talking to men. My new-found ally was, as yet, cool and therefore enthusiastic, and I found myself shuffling along beside him, almost weeping from my blistered feet, out beyond the suqs to a strange, clean quarter of the town where England occupies a large white house with a wide view of hill and sea. Thereafter I seriously began to wonder whether I was dreaming. After a short wait in a breezy hall, where a Sikh gave me the first good water I'd tasted in Jedda, my Egyptian friend beckoned me upstairs into an office replete with every kind of punkah and fan.

"I have told him. He will help, but he does not speak good Arabic. Have you no few words of English?"

I regretted deeply that I had not, but said hopefully that we all spoke French in the Alexandrian harems.

A hot, bored, somewhat shy officer greeted me with stilted, courteous phrases, upon which I became so loquacious that he turned helplessly to my companion. I apologized and proffered my story in French, my countryman replying in a most exotic language, with many gesticulations to help him out. However, he promised to write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and secure the passports and, in a state of complete bewilderment, I left. On the stairs the dreamlike feeling increased, for Colonel Lawrence passed me, demure and neat and very hot under his yellow kufiya.



He glanced disgustedly at my dirty white and made a disparaging remark to his unknown companion, who replied: "She has rather fine eyes, but probably she's got skin disease under that veil. 'They all have.'"

In the hall we met my old friend Haddad Pasha, mopping his brow, and the sudden frantic desire to laugh and laugh, with which I had been struggling for the last half-hour, overcame me. I kicked off a sandal and choking, coughing, blindly groped for it till my friend had stumped upstairs.

The whole town was full of camels as we returned by dim, twisting by-ways, under old arches and through covered passages, where Bedouin drivers with scarlet kufiyas and coarse sacking abbas, smoked long-stemmed shishas and discussed the prospects of the pilgrimage. The different quarters of the town might have been different countries, for each was devoted to pilgrims of special boats. Thus just below us were Javanese, and farther away Indians. That year no pilgrims came from Syria or Turkey, and the cross-country routes were closed, but 40,000 Javanese had come from Islam's new nurseries, where yearly she is gaining ground in the Far East, and 4,000 Indians. Two boat-loads of Persians, Shias of course, were expected that day, but the great mass of pilgrims had already gone on ahead. The Mahmal was arriving and would visit the tomb of our Mother Eve the following day with ceremony and music, before going on to Mecca.

As we were assured by the sympathetic Egyptian that we should most certainly receive our passports next morning, we were able to watch, unmoved, the departure of our fellow-Egyptians. The loading of their camels took nearly seven hours, during which the deafening babel never ceased for a single instant, so that even Bahia breathed a sigh of relief when the end of the camel string, roped head to tail, lurched

out of our narrow alley with final shouts and roars of expostulation, encouragement and good wishes.

Our peace was short-lived. Abdulla and Mohammed nervously, but quite definitely, refused to be seen in the streets with us, or to perform any other service for such doubtful characters as we had become. This attitude, however, merely roused the sympathies of some of the neighbours with whom we had fraternized, and shortly the Egyptian quarter was divided, but the larger portion was in our favour. In every country where the masses suffer silently at the hands of officialdom, it is enough to murmur the words "Hakooma-siassa" (government-politics) with a significant gesture, to become a popular martyr. Many people came to ask me not to "anger myself sick," and my Egyptian relations became more and more powerful with Bahia's righteous indignation.

The mosquitoes took their nightly meal, and about 5 a.m., with a most sympathetic escort, we made the obligatory visit to the tomb of our Mother Eve, who, by the way, was considerably more than two hundred feet long. On the way we met some of the Egyptian officers escorting the Mahmal, and the oddity of the pilgrim garb struck one forcibly when one saw these smart, modern young men riding well-groomed polo-ponies, yet clad only in bath towels! Mother Eve seemed a long way off that morning, though she is only just outside the town. One of my blisters had burst, which rather marred my enthusiasm for walking all round the sort of trench where Mother Eve is buried, with a little qubba about the middle of her anatomy and a chapel at each end.

Crowds of pilgrims were doing the visit, but we got near enough to touch the bars of the first chapel and repeat the suitable prayers after one of the guardians, who perform this office for a small fee. Beggars

of all ages swarmed on every side, for the pilgrims are generous, but they were contented with minute coins, as was also the incalculably filthy crone who took our shoes at the entrance to the qubba. Here we paid the guardian to make a special exhortation that Bahia's next child might be a boy and, having kissed the tomb and pressed our foreheads to the rail on all four sides, my hand-maiden forcibly wrenched some hairs from my head and tied them round a bar. "You will now have many sons," she said gravely, "perhaps thirteen."

When we returned to Bakr Hanawi's house, I found a letter, in execrable French, stating that the Minister of F.A. had been on the point of returning our passports, when he had heard that Abdul Melk had reported the matter to King Hussein.

This really settled the matter, for the king, who, like Abdul Melk, knew me personally, was the last man to allow a Christian on the pilgrimage; but I determined to make a final effort. I went to see the Sherif Mohammed and, by dint of quite shameless bribing, procured an introduction for Khadija hanem, to the Emir Zeid. The Sherifian family are generally easy of access to pilgrims, but an international conference was occupying all their leisure moments, so I had to wait till next day before a black soldier from the famous Bedouin guard led me up to a cool, wind-swept room overlooking the sea, where I was shortly joined by the Sherif's youngest son in a brown abaya and golden kufiya. I had almost touched Lawrence as he went out of the house and his unrecognizing stare made me confident that Zeid would not know me; but the East is more used to camouflage than the West, and, before I had said three sentences, I found my confession forestalled.

Unfortunately, the king had departed that morning

for Mecca, but his son promised to write to him at once and ask for a special permit. He also made me the most valued gift that Jedda can produce—a camel-load of water, which considerably cheered my remaining days in the town, in spite of the fact that the Sherif proved unrelenting and permission was refused one Khadija-daughter-of-Abdulla Fahmi to make the pilgrimage. She had, however, the doubtful satisfaction of being lionized by a large section of Jedda, who came to the conclusion that it was all a political arrangement of the English to stop a lady closely connected, through her well-known brother, with the Egyptian government, from coming into contact with the powers that be in Mecca.

“The English have good hearts,” said one learned sheikh, “but their politics are bad.”

Shortly after came the news of the Emir Feisul’s unanimous election to the Mesopotamian throne and, in the wave of enthusiastic satisfaction with which all Jedda acknowledged the triumph of her most popular prince, the wrongs of the Sitt Khadija were forgotten.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE AMERICAN VENTURE

“WELL,” said an interviewer, sitting on my bed at 9 a.m. a few mornings after I arrived in New York, “I must say I didn’t expect you to look like this.” Her gaze lingered on my black chiffon nightgown with its painted parakeets. Then she looked round the hotel room, possibly in search of a camel or a revolver, and her voice was inexorable.

“You must have been a disappointment to many—haven’t you? Why, you look just like an ordinary girl.”

The interview, during which I was addressed once or twice as “dearie,” left me feeling hot—or perhaps it was the steam heating—but it occurred to me afterwards that the special writer had expressed my own thoughts with regard to New York. So much was not as I expected, but I was certainly not disappointed.

As time went on my impressions were so heterodox that I dared not speak about them. Whenever I was asked what I liked best in America, I replied truthfully: “The people,” and ventured no farther.

Then, one day, I lunched with one of the most charming hostesses in a country which has a genius for hospitality, and she said to me: “My dear, if you want to be a success over here, you must never explain things to us. That’s the one thing we can’t stand.” Her eyes twinkled. “Some months ago Mrs. Asquith sat in that chair, and she explained to me who Matthew Arnold was.”

There was a pause, and I registered the vow which must have made my first lecture incomprehensible to any reporter who did not know Arabic and Arabia.

Months later, from the train, I watched the towering skyline of New York shoot up towards the stars, and I thought I understood the parable. There is no limit but the sky to American possibilities, but it is an American sky.

New York, the Cosmopolis which represents the striving of a hundred races to become a nation, is crushed between the narrow boundaries of her seas and rivers. So she has height without breadth. It is the same thing with the American people. Within their limits the only barrier to achievement is death. Outside them they are cramped by the "little learning" which "is a dangerous thing," and by their dislike of explanation.

There is no one quicker than an American within the circle of his knowledge, and no one slower without it. The circle narrows as one goes farther from Cosmopolis, till, in the Middle West, it includes nothing that is not personal or local.

As Manhattan is compressed by the Hudson and the East Rivers, so the American is cramped by the system of which he is a cog. The United States seemed to me a vast mechanical triumph, of which man was only temporarily the director until a satisfactory Robot could be invented.

In many cases it was delightful just to relax, knowing that the special system which was either transporting or housing or feeding one would certainly do all that was expected of it; but the button habit in daily life is apt to atrophy the power of thought. The pressure of a button in America will produce anything from a cocktail, of more or less odd ingredients, to a special train or an electric bath. Such a complicated system-

atization of life inevitably reacts on the mind, and often it seemed to me that I heard the creaking of cogs in a conversation which appeared as impersonal as the method which had brought me to hear it. I wondered what would happen if, owing to an eruption of spontaneity, the cogs were disarranged—internal combustion at least!

The mass spirit may have been the salvation of America, but it is a danger to all Americans, for it annihilates individuality. There is no privacy in the land, and it is in loneliness that personality is developed.

How is it that Americans all remain so young? Perhaps it is by the force of their most determined will, or their optimism which is so infectious, or the fund of engaging simplicity which makes them gay and keen, so that it is impossible to spend a dull moment among them. Perhaps, after all, it is just that quality, for, whatever they are, they are never dull.

In spite of this, I think the angles of their individuality are rubbed off by the persistent friction of a crowd. The narrower the circle, the stronger the friction, so that westward the mass habit is most strongly developed. Their home life, with its typical open doors, so that each room offers an invitation to its neighbour, is disappearing before the onslaught of club, hotel and restaurant.

Headlines get wilder as they go West. In New York I told a reporter that the Arabian sheikh would not recognize "the sheek" of the cinema. Manhattan contented itself with a column on "British Woman Explodes Cave-man Theory," and Boston only went one better: "Desert Sheeks Incapable of Ardent Love." It was left to the Middle West to write in one-inch letters: "Sheeks as Tame as Kittens," to which the West replied in double headings: "Rosita a Bad Girl! Says Sheeks are Bums."

What a great people the Americans might have been had they lived in a smaller country. As it is, they are overwhelmed by the size of their land and the magnitude of its opportunities.

The American does not want to be told marvellous things about which he knows nothing. He wants to hear the ordinary things he knows told in a different manner. Curiosity and caution appear to be equally strong in the public breast.

In America extremes do not meet. They progress side by side towards the same aim. Politics are unpopular with the majority of Americans, because they do not allow sufficient individual scope. As a side-line to crime or business, they are as useful as mortar to a jerry-built villa. Banditry and commerce provide equally quick profits and unlimited opportunities of personal exploitation. In the States the former is the natural outcome of the trade boom. It is the ebullition of a vigorous nation, seething with undigested success.

America has been inoculated with every kind of immigrant blood, with every cult, religion and philosophy. Her conflicting and unnecessary laws have inflamed the freebooting spirit, which has never been wholly dormant since her pioneers went westwards, marking the first trails with their blood. On the top of all this she has "got rich quick," and there really appears to be no end to the expedients by which she can "get rich quicker!"

Is it remarkable, then, that her buccaneering youth, bred on the frontiers of change, their first motto "Scrap it," whether the rubbish scrapped be worn-out machinery or inefficient humanity, seriously consider whether "shooting up" the last generation's authority is not a quicker way of "getting on or getting out" than breaking it by some "slick" financial combine?



It must be remembered that the whole of American life is based on the excellence of her credit. The social and economic structure is an inverted pyramid, for everyone is living one stage ahead of what he or she is earning. The point of the vast triangle is balanced among the banks. Its base, raised above the highest skyscrapers, supports, without a tremor, schools, universities, business, commerce, and finance, every stage of the American self-investment scheme.

In Europe we live too much for the day. The American lives not only *for*, but *on* one "rise" ahead. His credit is always fully pledged, so he can never take a breather, never hesitate, never "stay put." We, in older, less adaptable countries, are always waiting for a new year or a new government, for trade revival, a fall in the bank rate, or lower taxation. We wait for opportunity. The American makes it.

As soon as a man marries, he borrows from a building society and constructs his house under a mortgage, which he repays as he mounts from one job to another. Everything is bought on the hire-purchase system, for no American is frightened of pledging his income. He will not tie up capital—if he has any—but he will mortgage his own powers of production to the  $n$ th degree.

The young salesman or advertisement agent never saves. "I guess I'm the best possible investment for my money," he says, and proceeds to boom himself.

I knew one of the managers of a New York agency who worked on commission, and earned a maximum of £2,000 a year. The directors realized his worth and offered him a four years' contract at a flat salary of double this amount. He refused. "Why, I might nail a million dollar contract, and then think what my commission would be!" he exclaimed. Very few

Europeans would refuse a certain £4,000 a year, for the doubtful possibility of making more on commission. Yet this is the typical American spirit.

In the States, opportunity is plentiful, but competition is a mill grinding out the fittest, for no man sticks to one job if he thinks he can go farther in another. No man minds beginning again at the beginning, or at some totally different beginning. In England we specialize too much. A plumber remains a plumber. The expert is safe on his moss-grown pedestal. In America there are no pedestals, only ladders, and, as a college humorist remarked, "It's an even chance whether any particular ladder leads to the Tombs [prison] or the Senate."

In England we depend too much on our environment and too little on ourselves. California is as far away from New York as Canada from London, yet, to an energetic young Westerner, the migration in search of a better job would be no more than a week-end at Brighton to us. We need self-confidence. If we have sufficient, life becomes a question of opportunity, and it matters not at all whether it be staged in Manchester or Australia.

Growth is the slogan of America, a careless growth where wreckers and builders work side by side. Round the thriving cities, along the arterial railway lines, are scattered the remnants of "scrapped" machinery, the frames of discarded houses, and the souls of little people who could not keep up with the rush.

There are not many of these latter, for, where everything is temporary, from the shack to the skyscraper, man's opportunity is only limited by his enterprise.

The peculiar form of idolatry to which England is bound has no following in the States. Where everyone is on the make, where the factory hand of

Monday may be the bond-salesman of Wednesday, or the electrician may invent a rubber substitute in his "evenings off," there can be no static idols.

In England, the hardest thing in the world is to lose a reputation, or even the adjectives attributed to it; but in America no form of genius can rest on its laurels.

Managers, editors and politicians are looking ahead for "new stuff." No lion has time to cultivate his mane.

In spite of all our boasted modernity, we English are so frightened of the new. Unconsciously, we still look back to those halcyon days before the war, when each man was glued to the state in which he was born, the income tax was a shilling, the head labourer's wage was under a pound a week, and *Who's Who* was appropriately slim. No wonder America is bootlegging and gunmen seem as unnatural to us as her instability of fortune, her architecture, and the arrangement of her sleeping cars.

She is the supreme anomaly, the freest country in the world, so far as action is concerned, but the most law-ridden. I forget how many million laws she has, but I believe the Massachusetts Blue Laws, by which no form of transport, not even a wheelbarrow, may operate during the hours of church services, are still unrepealed. The Mann Act, by which no man may pay a woman's fare into the next State, and innumerable others, seek to regulate morality. Some States forbid smoking. Others consider the sight of a revolver on the films contaminating to the public.

Among this welter of swaddling bands, how can a citizen choose the essential and eliminate the absurd? The consequence is that law, manipulated by the rake and the Puritan, by graft, politics, expediency, by sellers of dope and drink, above all, by a passionate

conviction that America can *make* good if only she *makes* enough laws, means nothing at all.

America is not old enough to have established a custom more rigid than law, so to each man is left the responsibility of his own actions. Where the average Englishman is afraid of responsibility, because he has been born in a groove, and the War Office, the Foreign Office, his trade union, or his business schedule has welded him into it, the American accepts it as a birthright.

With confidence and credit equally unlimited, the surface of American life is bound to erupt with new crimes as well as with new art, new inventions, and new headlines of all sorts; but, *au fond*, the States are a huge self-investment scheme, guaranteed against loss by the resilient material of which the inverted pyramid is made.

The American's pride in his country is not really concerned with what she has given him, but with what he has done, or will do, for her. We take more interest generally in our children than in our parents. Every American city is the progeny of its citizens and shares in their self-investment scheme. If they are out to dazzle strangers with their opulent success, their city must do the same, sharing their prosperity, and their conviction that still greater prosperity will be the result of their labours.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### EXPLORING AMERICA

WHILE America was still to me an adventure, breathless, bewildering and deafening, I lunched in a palace on Fifth Avenue, and lunch was very late indeed, because the debutante daughter had not reappeared after dancing till five that morning. Everyone waited patiently and sympathetically, except a young brother, who suggested that the maiden might still be asleep. He was promptly rebuked, and about two o'clock, with a flurry of high heels and French skirts, Beauty ran in and demanded a cocktail. She was given three, which she drank amidst gay murmurs of apology. "Now a cigarette!" said the gorgeous creature, who must have been nearly six feet tall and glowingly Junoesque. Even the feminine portion of the lunch party fumbled for matches, while the male element proffered every known form of cigarette case. "Shall we go in, dear?" suggested the hostess, tentatively, and Beauty swept us along in her wake, dazzled by the orange tint of her lips, by the scent of her orchids, and the revelation of her frock.

Beauty ate heartily, when she was not smoking, and her conversation was unintelligible to the stranger, since it consisted entirely of Christian names and relationships unsanctified by the Social Register. Half-way through lunch I began to wonder if I were in New York, or if I had strayed back to Paris or Vienna by mistake. Before I had solved the question of

environment, we were playing bridge for ten-cent points. With a dozen telephonic interruptions, this continued till seven, when Beauty, good-tempered throughout a run of bad luck, went off to be massaged before the evening's ball. "By the way, what's going on in England?" she asked, with the warm interest her countrywomen managed to infuse into their simplest questions. I said something about the Labour Government, but Beauty interrupted: "Has mah jong quite cut out bridge?" Satisfied on this point, she asked: "How do you like America?" I looked round the room which was a panelled copy of an old French manor. "I haven't seen it yet," I said.

Next day I left New York, which struck me as a most attractive and interesting expression of a hundred European aspects, and I went to America.

Some time ago a commission was sent to the Middle West to discover why the average housewife between the ages of thirty and forty-five was so discontented. I read the digest of that report, which covered ninety-three pages, and decided that it could have been expressed in a sentence. The average woman is sick of culture and longing for romance, but, like her husband, she has become a cog in the complicated, but efficient machinery which grinds the expert out of mediocrity, and she cannot escape.

At thirty the typical small-town woman has learned how to run her house adequately and by means of as many mechanical appliances as possible. She has mastered the intricacies of electrical washers, dryers, cookers and cleaners. She has probably acquired a maid to do her worst with the laundry and her best with furniture polish. She has had as many children as the budget, or the size of the house, will permit. Her husband has ceased to be a lover, and she begins to wonder if he ever was one. In fact, her life is narrow-

ing to a matter of habit, just as her husband's is widening out. The man's business is probably beginning to prosper. He has become a member of the local Rotary Club and, for the first time in his life, he feels he is a somebody. While he is in the club, which admits only one representative of each local industry or profession, he is no longer a link in a chain, but an ambassador, the plenipotentiary of his trade. His opportunities are increasing and he has no time for his wife. If she makes a trip she must go alone. In fact she is nearly always alone—a business widow during the week and a health widow on Sundays, during which her husband hits balls vigorously, not always because he likes the game, but because it is a means to physical efficiency.

The wife joins another club, buys a new beauty specific, and reads the sex Press, but she realizes that she is not going to get any more romance out of life than can be supplied by the movies, or by that type of novel which breaks all modern laws of psychology.

To begin at the beginning. In the co-educational colleges which are the pride of America, the girl who is not going in for a profession wastes three or four of the best years of her life. She studies abstruse subjects, abnormal psychology, anthropology, scientific telepathy and philosophy, which can be of no use to her in married life. "Why do you do it?" I have asked innumerable college girls; and the reply has generally been some variant of: "It's good to get at the root of things."

There is a passion among American youth for getting to the bottom of life, but it must be a scientific bottom. They are pathetically earnest and serious minded, so they treat everything as a problem. Love, marriage, children, work, play, housekeeping, are all problems to be solved biologically or economically,

but always scientifically. There is no adventure in American youth. It is out for what is stolidly worth while, and its skin is prematurely lined by the standardized pattern of its thought.

The aims of co-education are to treat boys and girls alike, "until"—as one university president put it—"in the end, we really forget which is which."

"Oh, the poor girls!" exclaimed a great French professor, to whom I repeated this. "What insensate cruelty."

On the college bookshelves you will find all the "osophies" and "ologies," with the most modern novels, where action is smothered in self-analysis. After each travel lecture in such places of heterogeneous culture, the girls used to come to me and ask about romance. I got used to such questions as "Are there cave-men in Arabia?" "Are sheeks really attractive?" "Is there romance in the desert?" And one maiden, studying Freudianism—though only nineteen, she was already engaged to a railway engineer—summed up the matter: "We're stifled with reactions. I guess we want a bit of action to clear us up!"

If the girl is preparing for business or a profession, college gives her a suitable training, but if she is getting ready for the far more difficult job of marriage, she is apt to dip haphazard into every subject but domestic economy.

Since the education of the average American man is strictly specialized according to the career he chooses, it only adds to his wife's isolation if she is superficially interested in a score of sciences extraneous to their clearly defined and often narrowing existence. The man cannot share her interests, because his are concentrated on the one essential of getting on. Consequently the wife tries to satisfy herself with more and more ill-assorted culture, until she suffers from



mental indigestion, at which point the Press convinces her that she is missing a great deal in life.

Half the fault lies in the too early marriages which often follow or even interrupt the course of co-education. All over America, boy-and-girl marriage is encouraged by the national economists, whose slogan is, "Let them grow up together, watch the home develop, and build up a joint career." That is nice in theory, but it actually means that Nineteen and Twenty-one, with none of the experience which the wider life of Europe affords, marry before they have any knowledge of what they want. They live in lodgings, separately or together, and continue their college career. Babies come while the girl is still absorbed in her studies and she resents their interruption. Then her life is a matter of milestones, the first being the advent of the coloured servant, for whom she has waited ten years.

It is very rare that the "growth of the home" brings undiluted satisfaction to the college wife, for, after all, in a land where the servant problem can be solved only by the rich, it merely increases her domestic labours and, with them, the restrictions by which marriage has surrounded her.

It is still rarer for a young couple to "build up a career together," for the man's interests are specialized and the woman's still fluid. Marriage has changed her outlook and her mode of life so little that she is still searching for the reasons for both.

Every form of American enterprize is catering to the restlessness of women. The large drapers' shops give free courses in dressmaking to any girl who chooses to join their classes. Many of the co-operative groceries run lecture courses on domestic economy. Conferences on the same subject are held at clubs and educational societies. The advertisers have realized that, in America, it is the woman who has the spending power, since

once a week or once a month she receives the salary her husband is so busy making that he has no idea of how to use it.

Therefore, all luxury advertisements are aimed at women, and, as a result, the sale of cosmetics alone has increased 2,000 per cent. during the last ten years.

The final appeal to women is the club life, which is more and more solidly developed as one goes farther from the coasts, with their influences of Europe or the Orient. In the Middle West—the most typical sector of America—home life is disappearing altogether before the onslaught of the clubs.

This is partly because the advent of money gives the American wife a little more leisure, but no more opportunity. Dollars have ceased to have a reasonable purchasing power, because they cannot buy labour. For instance, I have often stayed in a small suburban house, where my hostess personally directed every detail of the service, and discovered later that her fortune, changed into pounds, would have enabled her to live luxuriously in Mayfair.

The banks will always advance money for schooling, or for home building, but every family is thus labouring under a succession of mortgages.

The American business man is rightly optimistic, believing that the best possible investment for capital is his career, as represented by what he appears to be. Therefore, the scale of living is always a little in advance of his pay-roll.

Thus service does not increase with the size of the house, and in many small towns the wife prefers to dispense with a servant rather than give up the owner-driven car. In this case she will rise about 6.30, prepare breakfast with the aid of what we, in England, should call a charwoman, drive her husband to the office, return to see that "the help" has cleaned up the

house, and spend the rest of the day at one of half a dozen clubs. In the evening she will drive "down-town" to fetch her husband and they will dine at a hotel, before returning to the empty house. Yet this man may be earning an annual income of two or three thousand pounds.

The American women's clubs are the most attractive in the world. They are the ultimate expression of modernity in colour, range and efficiency; but they are steeped in that atmosphere of culture which is like a moulting eiderdown to personality. Clubwomen are in danger of losing the power of individual thought. For airless, steam-heated hours they absorb second-hand information until their brains are too comatose to reason. In a Chicago club I heard four lectures in a single day, on such varying subjects as "The Man's Work in the Home," "You *Are* What You *Eat*," "The Abnormal in Modern Literature," and "Mysticism and Opportunity." At the end I was left with two ideas to which I clung like straws in a flood of sound. One was that one should not eat lunch, and the other that man's place anywhere was narrowing to that of a cash register. A chairman, in returning thanks, remarked approvingly that she had "Never heard so many words in so short a time."

In America, lecturers tell the kindest-hearted of all audiences what to read, and why to read it, what to eat, think, see and do—which means that womanhood is being standardized like every other product of an efficient but unimaginative race. It is a pity, because the material is splendid. There is nothing in the world quite so nice as the young American woman, and she is as much an expert at her job as her husband. She can produce a degree of comfort and order in her house which only the professional can do in England. She is the best mother in the world, perhaps because she

is so often starved in her wifhood. Children seem to be a much more personal possession in America than in England. In the smaller houses there are no definite shut-apart nurseries, and often no nurses. The whole house is open to the children, and their mother shares them with nobody. Their future is the one horizon which is her own. Through the eyes of a hundred super-trained lectures she may garner impersonal impressions, but her children are her one individual adventure. If she is ultra-modern, their upbringing will be an incubation, with the physical and psychological tabulated as neatly as the vitamins which build up the one and the complexes which endanger the other. But, in the absence of such wedges as nurses and governesses, the family is more solid in America than anywhere else I know.

The idea of a young couple in England is often to settle as far away as possible from both their families. In America you get a group system among the moderately well off, in which brothers and sisters build their houses as close together as possible, and their children follow suit. It seems to me that marriage in the States is soon swamped in motherhood, but that there is something almost patriarchal about the family. This is more strange in a country where divorce is facile, but then divorce is still largely the property of the wealthy and notorious. It has never stirred the great mass of middle-class America, which is amazingly alive—and yet not living!

It is said there is no class in America, but I think there is no country which has so well defined a middle class. It may be temporary, just a pause in an apartment, which is a paradise of plumbing, between the four-room frame cottage and the brownstone or French Gothic palace. But, though constantly shifting, it is an obvious stage in American life and it provides



the most solid matter for comparison and conclusion.

To this class belong the mass of the business women of the States. Here is an entirely different conception of existence, and one far better co-ordinated to the trend of the American procession than that of the average wife.

Everywhere you find these women, cool, capable, successful, as directors of advertising firms, secretaries to great financial companies, editors, art directors, managers of libraries and shops. To me they are the outstanding features of that American system, which claims, by co-education, to ignore nature and give equal chances to men and women.

In industrial or professional Europe it is an error to be a woman and a crime to be a young woman. Masculine jealousy runs high and "feminine trespassers will be prosecuted" is nailed across every opening. In the American mart, however, sex is immaterial. If she has the nerve, a woman can get as far as a man, and she will be hammered no worse, if no less, than her brothers. In fact, she starts one-up on man, for she is more subtle. Therefore, she never gets quite so standardized as her competitors. You find her supreme in the most interesting side of business, where the headlines are painted, the slogans invented, and plots laid against the buying psychology of a continent.

It was in Illinois that I began to be asked "What is your message?" for, twenty-four hours from New York, the Puritan spirit is as developed as the prickles on a hedgehog. The great god Pan would be put in a criminal lunatic asylum if he ever appeared in Illinois. Yet the average Middle-Western woman finds it easier to listen to the ideas of somebody on a platform rather than to form her own individual opinion.

It is curious that money, while it will buy you any amount of other people's experience, seems to be an insuperable barrier against acquiring your own. That, I suppose, is why Americans rarely travel; they just tour in a congenial group, which hurries by train de luxe, or mammoth steamer, from one international hotel to another. The real traveller must be used to loneliness, which no American can endure, and he must be poor. Then he will wander afoot and on horseback, by tramp steamer or yawl, his saddle his pillow, a native hut his hotel, from one odd corner of the earth to another. I believe America prefers to hear about civilized tourism, which it can follow in the light of recollection and anticipation, rather than exploration and adventure, which makes it feel hot and thirsty, and gives it a horrible fear that its leg is being pulled.

Nevertheless, America always says the right thing at the right moment, and says it eloquently. I remember one of my chairmen remarked: "In this town George Washington was told that only his modesty equalled his courage. Madam, only your eloquence equals the courage at which we guess, but of which you have said nothing."

America has the gift of speech. Any of her citizens can give a good extempore address, apparently on any subject, but fluency is the stumbling-block of most of her orators. In the Middle West I have listened to eloquent discourses after the huge semi-official lunches in which its hospitable and gregarious soul delights, and found that nothing whatsoever had been said in them. One famous publicist, whose speech was supposed to be concerned with "obsolete customs," spoke for half an hour about the two useless buttons on a man's coat-sleeve. The subject fascinated him, and he could not get away from it. The audience

listened with the utmost good temper, as it always does; but then, I think, Americans are the best-tempered people in the world. Perhaps this is why they all look so young, in spite of the steam-heated, airless lives they lead.

It was in a Western train that I first saw the notice, "Keep your temper. Nobody else wants it." A few days later I was travelling on a limited express, which is the aristocrat of trains, and a thief walked the whole length of a Pullman sleeper, tearing down, as he passed, the clothes which were hanging on the stretchers just inside the curtained berths. There was a wild commotion in the morning, because nobody could get up; but, after an hour or so, a crowd of perfectly amiable people descended, clad in immaculate coats and hats, but with extraordinary nether garments, obviously lent by firemen and waiters. Expressing my sympathy to a charming girl who had draped herself in a rug, I remarked that if such a thing had happened in England there would have been "a terrific row." "Oh, but is it worth while?" asked my fellow-passenger, and left me wondering.

Six years ago I stayed in a large country house in Pennsylvania. The only daughter, aged eighteen, was an exquisite creature with daffodil hair and a skin that could stand the sheer yellows she loved to wear. The whole household revolved round her—her horses, her car, and the crowd of young men who sent her flowers. When I returned to America a year or so ago, I asked at once for my daffodil maid. I found her married to a good-looking young giant whose working hours were from 8 a.m. till 7 p.m. She had two babies, nearly as delicious as herself, and a six-room cottage with one very green servant. She drove her husband to the station every morning at 7.30, returned by way of the local town to do her own marketing, and, when

I burst in upon her about 11 a.m., she was experimenting with mushroom soup for a dinner-party of twelve equally efficient young things. Her diamond solitaire lay on the cookery book, and she had dropped a dab of cream on the most intriguing shoe I had seen for a long time.

If American girls are spoiled, as we are led to believe, I think it is only fair, for the American woman pulls her full weight and a little more. In 1917 I stayed in a Middle-Western house where the young husband was earning a large salary in the avuncular bank. There were orchids scattered about the drawing-room and all the things that go with them. On my last visit I found my friends beginning at the foot of the ladder again. The husband had decided there was no further opening in bonds, so he had bought a broken-down factory, where he worked sixteen hours out of the twenty-four and was making various things, which are usually wooden and heavy, out of compressed paper. I confess to a certain vagueness of comprehension, but I found a tray of the curious stuff under my hats on the wardrobe shelf.

I asked the college-graduate wife if she minded playing nurse to her three babies and the rest of the narrow life necessitated by the factory's financial appetite. "Oh, no," she said; "it's so good for Mr. Fleming" (they always speak of their husbands formally as Mr. So-and-So!) "to start on his own. Father says there's about one chance in ten the thing will succeed and, if it does, it will be great."

I wonder sometimes where these young women, with their gallant hopefulness, get their reward, for after the first few years, marriage, as it is understood in Europe, has drifted into the background. I think an American woman, if she had to choose between them, would always stick to her children rather than



to her husband. It is the fault of the men, for they are often inexperienced and self-conscious, and nearly always impersonal.

The Arab says that "Paradise is under the feet of the mothers." I think the future of America is under the feet of her indomitable young mothers.

## CHAPTER XXX

### AN ABSURD ESCAPE

WHEN I was in America, reporters and college youths, with the same instinct for concentrated thrills, used to ask: "Can you remember the most exciting moment in your life?" In the midst of replies suited to the quality of information required, I used to wonder which was really my most exciting experience—probably something youthful and impromptu, like climbing out of a convent window to go to a Covent Garden Ball—but I have never had any doubt as to which was the most absurd.

It happened years ago in such a perfectly proper place in the Sudan that I dare not mention its name, and it was the result of curiosity, ignorance, and a money-belt stuffed with gold.

It was very hot and I was very bored. For three days we had been in camp on the outskirts of "Ain X," and, owing to a sudden epidemic among the camels, there seemed no immediate prospect of continuing our journey south. The cluster of mud houses that formed the town afforded neither interest nor amusement, and time would have hung even heavier on my hands had it not been for the stream of Arabs who came to be cured of all ills to which human flesh is heir. I had distributed my simple remedies impartially and, since quinine is a universal desert panacea, most of my patients had returned to bless me. One woman, in particular, whose small son I had cured of malaria, hung about the outskirts of the camp and

murmured soft greetings, "Thy life is on my head," whenever I passed.

This afternoon, however, the townsfolk slept, or idled in the shelter of their sun-baked walls, and I had nothing to do but flick away the flies which were like a thick black curtain in my tent, where the thermometer registered 120° Fahrenheit. At last I decided that even the glare of the sandy streets would be an improvement, so I sauntered through the palm trees towards the mosque, the one fine building among the huts, whose clay domes had the appearance of a monstrous mushroom crop. A small boy, curled in the shade of a pillar, wiped the flies from his eyes with a grimy knuckle.

"Ya Sayeda, would you see the town?" he shrilled at me.

I nodded absently, and for an hour we drifted from one blind walled street to another.

"I am thirsty," I said at last, making a gesture of drinking.

The boy hesitated. "Would you visit the coffee-house of Saed Ba Hamed?" he asked. But, when I assented, he still looked at me doubtfully. "There are dancers," he said, "but it is not for strangers."

My interest stirred and I produced a coin to hurry his decision. With a shrug, he doubled back towards the labyrinthian markets. It was cooler now, and we passed a few blue-robed women on their way to the well. One turned to stare after us and, when she called a question to my guide, I recognized her as Zahra, the mother of my erstwhile patient. At the corner I looked back and saw her standing irresolute. I thought she gestured to me, but my small guide had quickened his pace, and it was almost at a run that we passed through the last twisting passages, to be confronted by a door which looked as if it had not

been opened since Aladdin polished the lamp which hung over it. At a signal rapped by the boy the mighty hinges creaked and, through a slit which allowed nothing of the interior to be seen, a voice indulged in a muttered colloquy.

"It is well, lady," said the boy at last. "Enter with safety. You will see strange things." He disappeared with the rapidity of a lizard, and, just as I was wondering how on earth I should find my way back, a hand drew me over the threshold and the door closed behind me.

"At your pleasure," said a voice. We went down a passage, indifferently clean, and across a court to a low-ceilinged room from which came a murmur of voices and the beating of a drum.

The silence of surprise greeted my entry, and, at first, I could see little for the smoke which drifted from the braziers and the long cigarettes which everybody seemed to be smoking. As my eyes grew accustomed to the half-light, I saw I was in a square, mud-walled room, round three sides of which ran low seats covered with carpets. On these, perhaps a dozen men were seated, and I did not like their looks. They were the mean-faced, weak-chinned product of semi-civilization which contact with Europe has evolved out of the original desert-bred Arab. To avoid their shifty eyes, which stared as no Bedouin's would have done, I kept mine fixed on the woman crouched beside the braziers, where a row of red clay jars, their spouts stuffed with aromatic herbs, held coffee. Nearly all the other women were Sudanese, with the thick features of their race, but she must have been a half-caste, for, to her youth and slimness, she added a certain fineness of feature uncommon among slaves. Her long hair fell in a quantity of plaits over the sheet-like white garment she wore





"SUDDENLY THE DANCE ENDED AND, POISED AS A STATUE, THE GIRL  
CHALLENGED THE PLAUDITS OF THE CROWD."



round her, the end flung over the right shoulder. There is no fastening to such a garment, and the art of the dancer consists in the violence of the muscular contortions she can contrive without disturbing the folds of her sheiba.

The fumes were beginning to make my eyes smart, and a whispered conversation between the master of the untidy place into which I had ventured and two of his anæmic guests; a conversation punctuated by glances in my direction, added to my discomfort.

Suddenly the dance ended, and poised as a statue, the girl challenged the plaudits of the crowd, to the thundering crescendo of drum and gourd.

There was general laughter and a buzz of talk, but, as the other women rose to distribute mouthfuls of bitter coffee, I thought I caught a signal exchanged between one of them and the guardian of the door. The next moment someone claimed admittance, and, amid a murmur of question and expostulation, Zahra pushed her way in. Without a glance at me, she established herself in the farthest corner. Other dances followed, and, after each white-robed figure had shown her skill, coffee was offered to the guests, who, under the influence of smoke and the stifling incense which drifted from the hearth, were becoming more and more lethargic.

At last a woman stooped over me with a half-filled cup and I took it gratefully, wondering if it was only my imagination, or if really my departure would be opposed. As I raised the cup to my lips I caught Zahra's eyes upon me. Their warning was unmistakable, but I did not need it to tell me the coffee was drugged. The first taste was enough, but I hesitated till I caught the meaning of Zahra's pantomime. Cautiously, I poured the liquid down inside my clothes, while making pretence of drinking;

but the furtive eyes which had watched me so persistently from the door were lowered, perhaps afraid of what their scrutiny would reveal.

In deference to Zahra's signals, as soon as I had handed back the empty cup, I showed every sign of lassitude. As my head dropped forward, after several apparently futile attempts to steady it, somebody pushed the cushions into a pile behind me. Relaxing against them, I should really have slept but for my smarting eyes and the excitement which hammered in every pulse. A town-bred black would commit most crimes for a little silver, and I had about me more than the modest fee demanded by a professional murderer. The thought was stimulating, but scarcely reassuring.

After a long time, it seemed to me, but perhaps it was only a few minutes, somebody shook my shoulder. Completely irresponsive, I sagged in the grip of the tall woman who had brought me the coffee.

"Let her sleep undisturbed," suggested the black in a loud voice, doubtless intended to impress those of his patrons who were not destined to share the spoils.

"It is the smoke and the heat," replied the woman. "Take her to the other room."

I clenched my teeth as I felt myself lifted and carried across the threshold, but I forced myself to remain inert. The hum of voices faded as I was dropped on to something which felt hard and rough. Then the woman's voice sounded close above me.

"By Allah, I tell you she will sleep the night through." An impatient hand fumbled at my pockets. "Presently, presently," expostulated the woman. "They have the eyes of hawks, those *mesqueen*"—she indicated with an epithet the smokers in the outer room. Her voice dropped and, after a moment's



whispering, I heard the two sets of footsteps receding. The door shut and a wooden bolt crashed into place.

There was silence and a little cool breeze fluttered over my face. My senses were now alert, and anger was beginning to take the place of fear, but it was long before I dared move. At last, with a grunt, as of a disturbed sleeper, I rolled over and peered around with half-closed eyes. The place was empty. There was nothing in the small spare room but the palm-rope couch on which I lay. The walls were of uneven, mud bricks, and, besides the door which led into the café, the only other opening was an unglazed window under the roof.

When I had convinced myself that I was alone, I scrambled up on the couch, but even then my fingers would not nearly reach the sill. There was nothing else to stand on and no means by which I could climb. Desperately I stared up at the rough aperture, through which the short southern twilight crept.

The shadows were lengthening. It would soon be quite dark.

When the first star came out in the indigo patch, I watched it with helpless bitterness.

Something hurtled through the window and fell at my feet. After a moment's hesitation, I felt for it in the darkness and thought it must be a woman's woollen sash weighted with a stone. Cautiously I tugged at it, and an answering pull came from the other end. Zahra! I had forgotten her signals in the gamut of my emotions, but now I understood them, and understood also that there was no time to lose.

My first attempt at escape resulted in nothing but an ignominious fall. I thought the crash as I slipped back on to the couch would have brought my jailers

to investigate, and, with beating heart, I awaited their advent. Reassured by the silence, I made a more practical attempt. This time I discarded my boots, and, by dint of digging my toes into every crevice, after several failures which took toll of skin and flesh, I succeeded in getting one arm over the sill. The last struggle was horrible. My feet were raw from scraping the sharp texture of the walls, and my knuckles flayed by contact where the sash was tight across the sill. I felt the sweat on my forehead as, straining every muscle, I forced one bleeding knee into the opening.

A final effort and I was kneeling in the aperture, panting and dishevelled, my throat full of dust.

The court below looked bright after the darkness of my prison, and I saw a dark-robed figure gazing up and gesticulating. It seemed horribly far below me, but, while I hesitated, it redoubled the urge of its signs. With a shudder, I lowered my feet over the edge, turned with a scrape that removed the last skin from my elbows, and dropped.

The crash was less violent than I had expected, for the mud was soft, but, even so, I felt I had jarred all my bones into inextricable confusion. Zahra gave me no time to contemplate my bruises. Her fingers gripped my arm, and, without speaking, she hurried me across the court and through various passages, each of which had a different, but equally unpleasant, smell, till a door barred our progress. In darkness, Zahra fumbled with the bolts, which gave under her eagerness, but with a noise that should have brought the pack at our heels. Another moment and we were in a starlit and deserted alley.

"Allah give us speed!" prayed Zahra, and it was the first word she had said. We ran. I did not know an Arab woman, encumbered by her draperies, could

run so fast, but, stumbling on my lacerated feet, from which the stones tore the last vestige of stocking, I had difficulty in keeping up with her.

At last, where a few beggars slept in the shadow of the mosque, we paused.

"Allah be praised!" breathed Zahra; "you are safe."

I looked down the silver-lighted path that led to my camp, and wondered how best to express my gratitude for such an ingenious rescue. Zahra cut short my protestation.

"It was a duty upon me," she said. "Your life is on my head." Then her dignity vanished. With a look of childish cunning, she held out her hand.

"Give me some of the silver I have saved for you, and Allah make you strong," she whined.

I do not think I had much time to be afraid on that occasion. I was so completely furious with myself.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### AN ARABIAN NIGHT'S ADVENTURE

**A**DVENTURE would be so much more satisfactory if it were consistent as a Greek drama. Unfortunately, it is a pendulum which swings between tragedy and farce.

I once spent a fearful night in the Wadi Musa with three travellers, who had forgotten their revolvers, while a disagreeable and half-starved section of the Wilad Ali, whose right to levy custom we had refused to acknowledge, discussed our immediate dispatch. In the morning I upset my only piece of bacon into the sand, which depressing fact I remembered long after I had forgotten the click of the rifle-bolts that had punctuated our night.

Another such instance occurred on an abortive attempt to penetrate Western Arabia, when the late Emir Idris was in power. It is tribal country and no caravan has right of passage from one "dira"<sup>1</sup> to another, unless accompanied by a local "rafiq" or guide. We were still in the Tehama, the flat country at the foot of the barrier ridge and Jusuf was getting anxious.

"Wallahi, it should be here!" he exclaimed for the twentieth time. "I tell you it is useless to go farther. Did not the sheikh say his guides would meet us while the desert was still flat as the bread a woman makes without yeast?"

The speaker raised himself clumsily in stirrups

<sup>1</sup> Range of a tribe.



shaped like coal-shovels. He was a townsman and a member of the Emir's household, sent with me as a witness of his prince's protection.

"Allah save us; we have lost the way, and if we enter the territory of the Ait Amra without their sheikh's guides to speak for us, we shall make no further journeyings on earth."

The fat man looked round apprehensively, as if he expected enemies to rise out of the earth. His purple robe was caked with the dust of a long day's travel, and his kufiya torn and stained with sweat.

"Did I not tell you that travelling was no fit pursuit for the noble?" he repeated, with the querulous impatience of a child. I had heard this reproach so often since we left the capital of the Emir five days ago that I only looked at my compass, reflectively.

Since the dawn, we had ridden south-east, across a rolling desert, where gazelles tempted our rifles and the wind was scented with sage-brush. Unless I had seriously miscalculated, this was the place where the Ait Amra guides should have met us. Anxiously I stared ahead to some sand dunes gilded by the sunset.

Jusuf's eyes were glued to my compass. "It is that thing of magic which has destroyed us," he said.

The Bedouin guards drew nearer to look at the needle which so loved the North Star. The tallest of them, Ahmed, who had sworn blood-brotherhood with me, leaned wearily on his rifle.

"We shall find a camping place in the dunes," he said, "and in the morning the guides of Ait Amra will come to us. Let us hasten or the night will catch us."

The baggage camels, which had collapsed with the suddenness of folding chairs, were prodded to their feet. With grunts from the animals and sighs from

Jusuf, the little procession moved onward. As we neared the dunes, the half-dozen armed Bedouins unslung their rifles and spread to right and left of the riders.

To encourage their vigilance, I drew a revolver from the sash of my scarlet native dress, but we were hideously at the mercy of attack. As the ridges closed round us in the dusk, I realized that any crest might hide a line of snipers and cursed my folly in leaving the open plain.

It came with appalling suddenness—the thing for which, unconsciously, I had been waiting. A single shot broke the velvet stillness, through which laboured our small caravan. Something whined past my ear, stirring my veil. Instantly, a line of fire lit the ridge on either side of us.

“Trapped!” A camel groaned and fell to his knees. The Bedouins threw themselves flat in the sand, firing at an invisible enemy. For a second the blood beat in my head and I turned my frightened stallion at the rise. A figure sprang up almost under my hoofs, and my bullet caught it in the throat. One of my own men was writhing on the ground. Another lay so huddled that I knew he was dead.

I could have shouted and screamed the fury that I felt, but my heavy draperies impeded my movements, and, as I struggled with them, it seemed that a bee stung my cheek. Something warm and wet trickled down my throat. Then a dark figure caught my rein, and, in the shadow, I hardly knew whether it was friend or enemy. “Ride, lady, there is no hope to fight!” cried the voice of Ahmed. He pointed to a flying figure, which already neared the safety of the plain. It was Jusuf, his stirrups swinging, his robe like a dark sail against the sunset.

I looked up and saw the tribesmen silhouetted

recklessly above us. My brain cooled and I started firing steadily.

"There is no danger," I told Ahmed between set teeth. "My life is protected." For a few seconds there was a duel between rifle and revolver. Then two of the dark blotches disappeared and, with a scream, my stallion reared.

Before I could recover my balance, the animal had bolted, and, in this undignified manner, I led a retreat which undoubtedly saved the situation. A man caught at my stirrup as I passed. It was the wounded Bedouin. I bent down to drag him to the saddle, but he was too heavy. My stallion plunged his way free, and in vain I wrenched at the bit.

It is not etiquette in the desert to pursue a foe, so, by the time the merciful dusk had closed round us, we were free of the open plain and could count our losses. We had left two dead among the dunes, but the wounded man had been rescued.

The night wind brought us to our senses, and, dejectedly, we turned backward to some ruined huts we had passed in the late afternoon. Jusuf had already reached them and we found him, speechless with indignation, in possession of the cleanest corner. His dignity had been affronted and he could think of nothing but a vengeance which I guessed would be by proxy.

Ahmed evidently had the same idea. "The hand of a townsman is too soft for the rifle," he said, "but, by my head and my eyes, I swear that I will have a life for each one of my brothers, and my wife shall not know me till this is done."

In silence we prepared for the night. The camel which had carried our stores lay dead across the borders of Ait Amra, and we had nothing with us but a few dates and a strip or two of dried gazelle meat. Worse

still, the goatskin which held the last of our precious water had been pierced by a bullet. "It is empty as the breast of my grandmother," announced Ahmed tragically; but a Bedouin relieved our gloom by announcing that there was an old well a few yards from the huts.

By this time it was pitch dark. We lowered the great gourd which served as a bucket into the depths, which seemed faintly phosphorescent, and brought it up satisfactorily filled.

"By Allah, there is something in the well," remarked Ahmed, as the gourd stuck for a moment. "Heaven grant it is not a jinn."

In darkness we divided our meagre provisions and drank the vilest water I have ever tasted. In darkness I tore up my sash and bandaged the wounded man's shoulder. Then, having given him the last of my aspirin, I crawled into a corner, rolled myself into a blanket, and went to sleep with my head pillowed on my arm.

The death chaunts of the Bedouin haunted my dreams and I saw again the two crumpled figures among the dunes. . . . My cheek was stiff and sore, so I woke vowing vengeance on the raiders and slept no more because of a curious pain which increased as the stars rose higher. Gradually I was conscious of movement in the hut. Generally, the Bedouin slept like statues, but now they flung themselves from side to side, punctuating their restlessness with groans.

"Wallahi, a snake eats my belly," came a woeful voice which I failed to recognize, and it occurred to me that the description exactly fitted my own agony.

"Allah, the water was accursed!" said another Bedouin. "There was certainly a jinn in the well."



Doubled up in my corner, I felt a cold sweat on my forehead. I was wondering what *had been* in the well, when a soft, fat voice beside me remarked faintly: "It is finished. By Allah, I am going to die."

"Allah forbid," I replied in a voice which I hoped sounded encouraging. "I have a powerful medicine which will cure you."

Contorted with pain, I crawled to the spot where I had left my saddle-bags, and, in pitch darkness, I began fumbling for the little bottle of brandy I reserved for such emergencies as these. Sighs drifted past me and I shivered a little, for it seemed as if the place were full of tormented spirits. My fingers shook when, after much futile searching, they closed round the precious flask.

Slowly, because of the pangs that wrung me, I crept back to Jusuf, but he did not answer when I spoke to him. In desperation I began feeling the huddled bodies, for, when an Arab makes up his mind to die, it takes strong measures to stop him. My hand struck against cartridge belt and sword, and I was sobbing in the darkness before I touched soft, yielding flesh and the weaponless girdle of the townsman.

"Jusuf, I have the medicine. It is very strong," I cried to him; but his pulse was almost gone and his head sagged inertly against my arm. Ruthlessly, I forced open his teeth and poured half the contents of the flask through them.

"Bismillah," murmured a Bedouin, "the claws of the evil one are rending me." Unconsciously my hand clutched my flesh as if it would hold it together in spite of the pain which wracked it. Then Jusuf spoke, and his voice was unexpectedly strong.

"By Allah, that is good medicine," he said. "Have you more of it?"

I handed him the flask, heard him gulping the last precious drops, and was mildly amused at the thought of his horror if he knew that the medicine was the spirit forbidden by his Prophet.

Then I must have dozed, for, when I was next conscious, the sun was pouring into the hut, which was empty except for the fat, silk-clad figure of Jusuf, who was eating doura grains with relish. Outside, silhouetted against the desert, were a group of my Bedouins talking to three strangers, evidently the dilatory guides of Ait Amra.

I stared dully at the pinched and haggard faces of my men, and decided that they would certainly accept blood-money for the kinsmen killed by Ait Amra. I never saw anyone look less like fighting than Ahmed. The recalcitrant guides evidently realized it, for they redoubled their explanations.

I heard repeated; "It was a mistake. Allah forgive us, for you were taken for an enemy," and then the magic word "silver," which heals so many feuds in the East.

Stupefied with pain, my hand went out to the flask, which glittered a few feet away. I stared without comprehension. That round, painted thing had never contained brandy. With a gasp I precipitated myself towards the bulging holsters whose contents had been scattered by my midnight search. There was the brandy flask intact, but I had no thought of thankfulness for the relief it promised.

For a full minute I glared at the gaudy glass clenched in my stiff fingers. I remembered—the gift of a courteous merchant on the coast—but my brain refused to grasp what I had done.

Jusuf spoke. "Of a certainty that was great medicine, oh lady," he said cheerfully. "But, by Allah, it burned my throat and stomach."

I stared at him wildly, for I was slowly realizing that I had given him half a bottle of eau-de-Cologne.

An hour later, when the question of blood-money and the return of the decapitated heads had been arranged to the satisfaction of my still very sick followers, curiosity drove me to the well.

"The caravan is ready to start, lady," shouted Jusuf, but I wanted to understand the reason of the night's suffering.

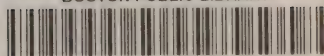
I called the word which, for centuries, has retarded the progress of the East—"Badein"—presently—and, a moment later, found myself looking down the well. A curious odour assailed my nostrils, and I noticed the water was shimmering with a pink putrescent slime. From its midst protruded the decaying legs of a dead—such a very dead—camel.

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